

UNCLE SAM'S BOYS - IN THE RANKS -

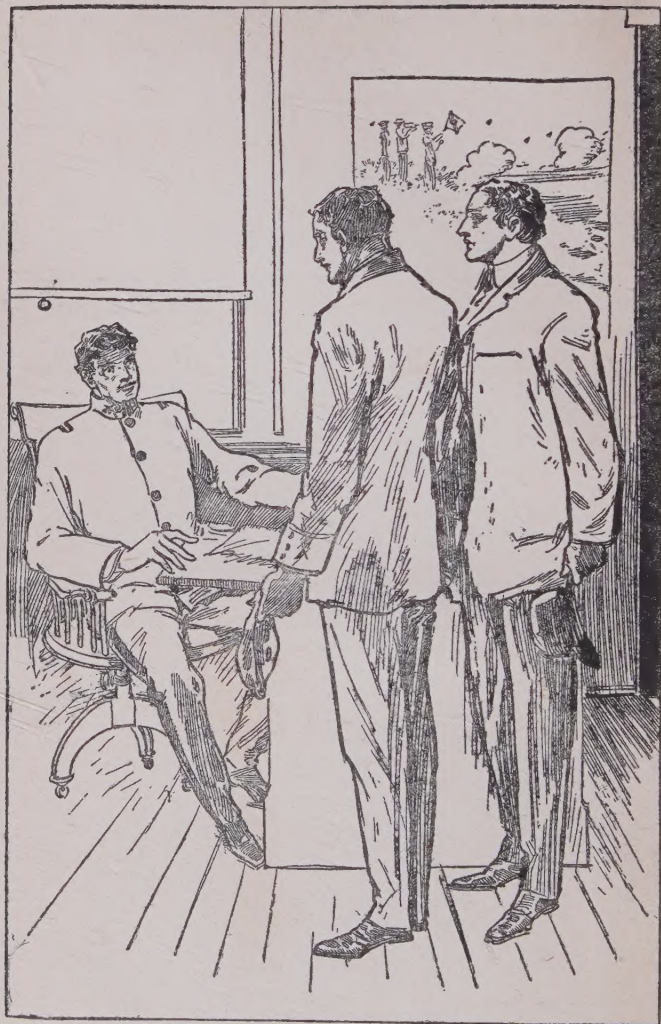
H·IRVING
HANCOCK



THE BOYS
OF THE
ARMY
SERIES

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“And These Are Your Applications?”

Frontispiece.

Uncle Sam's Boys in the Ranks

OR

Two Recruits in the United States
Army

By

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Etc., Etc.

Illustrated

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Uncle Sam's Boys in the Ranks

CHAPTER I

A LESSON IN RESPECT FOR THE UNIFORM

“**A**W, what’s the difference between a soldier and a loafer?” demanded “Bunny” Hepburn.

“A soldier ain’t a loafer, and it takes nerve to be a soldier. It’s a job for the bravest kind of a man,” retorted Jud Jeffers indignantly.

“Answer my c’nundrum,” insisted Bunny.

“It ain’t a decent conundrum,” retorted Jud, with dignity, for his father had served as a volunteer soldier in the war with Spain.

“Go on, Bunny,” broke in another boy in the group, laughing. “I’ll be the goat. What is the difference between a soldier and a loafer?”

“A soldier gets paid and fed, and the other loafer doesn’t,” retorted Bunny, with a broadening grin. A moment later, when he realized that his “joke” had failed to raise a laugh, Bunny looked disappointed.

“Aw, go on,” flared up Jud Jeffers. “You don’t know anything about a soldier.”

"But my dad does," retorted Bunny positively. "Dad says soldiers don't produce anything for a living; that they take their pay out of the pockets of the public, and then laugh at the public for fools."

"And what does your father do for a living?" demanded Jud hotly.

"He's a man who knows a lot, and he lectures," declared Bunny, swelling with importance. "When my dad talks a whole lot of men get excited and cheer him."

"Yes, and they buy him beer, too," jeered Jud, hot with derision for the fellow who was running down the soldiers of the United States. "Your father does his lecturing in small, dirty halls, where there's always a beer saloon underneath. You talk about men being producers—and your father goes around making anarchistic speeches to a lot of workingmen who are down on everything because they aren't clever enough to earn as good wages as sober, industrious and capable workmen earn."

"Speech, Jud!" laughingly roared another boy in the crowd that now numbered a score of youngsters.

"Don't you dare talk against my dad!" sputtered Bunny, doubling his fists and trying to look fierce.

"Then don't say anything against soldiers,"

retorted Jud indignantly. "My father was one. I tell you, soldiers are the salt of the earth."

"Say, but they're a fine and dandy-looking lot, anyway," spoke up Tom Andrews, as he turned toward the post-office window in front of which the principal actors in this scene were standing. The place was one of the smaller cities in New Jersey.

In the post-office window hung a many-colored poster, headed "Recruits Wanted for the United States Army." Soldiers of the various arms of the service were shown, and in all the types of uniforms worn on the different occasions.

"Oh, yes, they're a fine and dandy lot of loafers—they soldiers!" declared Bunny Hepburn contemptuously.

This opinion might not have gotten him into trouble, but he emphasized his opinion by spitting straight at the glass over the center of the picture.

"You coward!" choked Jud.

Biff!

Jud Jeffer's fist shot out, with all the force there is in fourteen-year-old muscle. The fist caught Bunny Hepburn on the side of the face and sent him sprawling.

"Good for you, Jud!" roared several of the young boys together.

"Go for him, Jud! He's mad, and wants it," called Tom Andrews.

Bunny was mad, all the way through, even before he leaped to his feet. Yet Bunny was not especially fond of fighting, and his anger was tempered with caution.

"You dassent do that again," he taunted, dancing about before Jud.

"I will, if you give me the same cause," replied Jud.

Bunny deliberately repeated his offensive act. Then he dodged, but not fast enough. Jud Jeffers's, his eyes ablaze with righteous indignation, sent the troublesome one to earth again.

This time Bunny got up really full of fight.

From the opposite side of the street two fine-looking young men of about eighteen had seen much of what had passed.

"Let's go over and separate them, Hal," proposed the quieter looking of the pair.

"If you like, Noll, though that young Hepburn rascal deserves about all that he seems likely to get."

"Jud Jeffers is too decent a young fellow to be allowed to soil his hands on the Hepburn kid," objected Oliver Terry quietly.

So he and Hal Overton hastened across the street.

Bunny Hepburn was now showing a faint

daub of crimson at the lower end of his nose. Bunny was the larger boy, but Jud by far the braver.

"Here, better stop all of this," broke in Hal good-naturedly, reaching out and grabbing angry Bunny by the coat collar.

Noll rested a rather friendly though detaining hand on Jud Jeffers's shoulder.

"Lemme at him!" roared Bunny.

"Yes! Let 'em finish it!" urged three or four of the younger boys.

"What's it all about, anyway?" demanded Hal Overton.

"That fellow insulted his country's uniform. It's as bad as insulting the Flag itself!" contended Jud hotly.

"That's right," nodded Hal Overton grimly. "I think I saw the whole thing. You're right to be mad about it, Jud, but this young what-is-it is too mean for you to soil your hands on him. Now, see here, Hepburn—right about face for you!"

Hal's grip on the boy's coat collar tightened as he swung Bunny about and headed him down the street.

"Forward, quick time, march! And don't stop, either, Hepburn, unless you want to hear Jud pattering down the street after you."

Hal's first shove sent Bunny darting along for

a few feet. Bunny discreetly went down the street several yards before he halted and lurched into a doorway, from which he peered out with a still hostile look on his face.

"Your view of the uniform, and of the old Flag, is all right, Jud, and I'm mighty glad to find that you have such views," Hal continued. "But you mustn't be too severe on a fellow like Bunny Hepburn. He simply can't rise above his surroundings, and you know what a miserable, egotistical, lying, slanderous fellow his father is. Bunny's father hates the country he lives in, and would set everybody to tearing down the government. That's the kind of a brainless anarchist Hepburn is, and you can't expect his dull-witted son to know any more than the father does. But you keep on, Jud, always respecting the soldier and his uniform, and the Flag that both stand behind."

"It gets on a good many of us," spoke up Tom Andrews, "to hear Bunny always running down the soldiers. He believes all his father says, so he keeps telling us that we're a nation of crooks and thieves, that the government is the rottenest ever, and that our soldiers and sailors are the biggest loafers of the whole American lot."

"It's enough to disgust anybody," spoke up Oliver Terry quietly. "But, boys, people who

talk the way the Hepburns do are never worth fighting with. And, unless they're stung hard, they won't fight, anyway."

"Oh, won't they?" growled Bunny, who, listening to all this talk with a flaming face, now retreated down the street. "Wait until I tell dad all about this nonsense about the Flag and the uniform!"

Hal and Noll stood for some moments gazing at the attractive recruiting poster in the post-office window. One by one the boys who had gathered went off in search of other interest or sport, until only Jud and Tom remained near the two older boys.

"I reckon you think I was foolish, don't you, Hal?" asked Jud, at last.

"No; not just that," replied Overton, turning, with a smile. "No American can ever be foolish to insist on respect for the country's Flag and uniform."

"I simply can't stand by and hear soldiers sneered at. My father was a soldier, you know, even if he was only a war-time volunteer, and didn't serve a whole year."

"When you get out of patience with fellows like Bunny Hepburn," suggested Noll Terry, "just you compare your father with a fellow like Bunny's father. You know, well enough, that your father, as a useful and valuable citizen,

is worth more than a thousand Hepburns can ever be."

"That's right," nodded Hal, with vigor. "And there's another man in this town that you can compare with Bunny's father. You know Mr. Wright? Sergeant Wright is his proper title. He's an old, retired sergeant from the Regular Army, who served his country fighting Indians and Spaniards, and now he has settled down here—a fine, upright, honest American, middle aged, and with retired pay and savings enough to support him as long as he lives. I haven't met many men as fine as Sergeant Wright."

"I know," nodded Jud, his eyes shining. "Sergeant Wright is a fine man. Sometimes he talks to Tom and me an hour at a time, telling us all about the campaigns he has served in. Say, Hal, you and Noll ought to call on him and ask him for some of his grand old Indian stories."

"We know some of them," laughed Hal. "Noll and I have been calling there often."

"You have?" said Jud gleefully. "Say, ain't Sergeant Wright one of the finest men ever? I'll bet he's been a regular up-and-down hero himself, though he never tells us anything about his own big deeds."

"He wears the medal of Congress," replied

Hal warmly. "A soldier who wears that doesn't need to brag."

"Say," remarked Jud thoughtfully, "I guess you two fellows are about as much struck with the soldiers as I am."

"I'll tell you and Tom something—if you can keep a secret," replied Hal Overton, after a side glance at his chum.

"Oh, we can keep secrets all right!" protested Tom Andrews.

"Well, then, fellows, Noll and I are going to New York to-morrow, to try to enlist in the Regular Army."

"You are?" gasped Jud, staring at Hal and Noll in round-eyed delight. "Oh, say, but you two ought to make dandy soldiers!"

"If the recruiting officer accepts us we'll do the best that's in us," smiled Hal.

"You'll be regular heroes!" predicted Jud, gazing at these two fortunate youngsters with eyes wide open with approval.

"Oh, no, we can't be heroes," grimaced Noll. "We're going to be regulars, and it's only the volunteers who are allowed to be heroes, you know," added Noll jocosely. "There's nothing heroic about a regular fighting bravely. That's his trade and his training."

"Don't you youngsters tell anyone," Hal insisted. "Or we shall be sorry that we told you."

"What do you take us for?" demanded Jud scornfully.

Hal and Noll had had it in mind to stroll off by themselves, for this was likely to be their last day in the home town for many a day to come. But Jud and Tom were full of hero worship of the two budding soldier boys, and walked along with them.

"There's Tip Branders," muttered Tom suddenly.

"I don't care," retorted Jud. "He won't dare try anything on us; and, if he does, we can take care of him."

"What has Tip against you?" asked Hal Overton.

"He tried to thrash me, yesterday."

"Why?"

"I guess it was because I told him what I thought of him," admitted Jud, with a grin.

"How did that happen?"

"Well, Tom and I were down in City Hall Park, sitting on one of the benches. Tip came along and ordered us off the bench; said he wanted to sit there himself. I told him he was a loafer and told him we wouldn't get off the bench for anybody like him."

"And then?" asked Hal.

"Why, Tip just made a dive for me, and there was trouble in his eyes; so I reconsidered, and

made a quick get-away. So did Tom. Tip chased us a little way, but we went so fast that we made it too much work for him. So he halted, but yelled after us that he'd tan us the next time he got close enough."

Tip Branders surely deserved the epithet of "loafer." Though only nineteen he had the look of being past twenty-one. He was a big, powerful fellow. Though he had not been at school since he was fifteen, Tip had not worked three months in the last four years. His mother, who kept a large and prosperous boarding-house, regarded Tip as being one of the manliest fellows in the world. She abetted his idleness by supplying him with too much money. Tip dressed well, though a bit loudly, and walked with a swagger. He was in a fair way to go through life without becoming anything more than a bully.

Hal Overton, on the other hand, was a quiet though merry young man, just above medium height, slim, though well built, brown-haired, blue-eyed, and a capable, industrious young fellow. The elder Overton was a clerk in a local store. Ill-health through many years had kept the father from prospering, and Hal, after two years in High School, had gone to work in the same store with his father at the age of sixteen.

Oliver Terry, too, had been at work since the

age of sixteen. Noll's father was engineer at one of the local machine shops, so Noll had gone into one of the lathe rooms, and was already accounted a very fair young mechanic.

Both were only sons; and, in the case of each, the fathers and mothers had felt sorry, indeed, to see the young men go to work before they had at least completed their High School courses.

By this time the fathers of both Hal and Noll had found themselves in somewhat better circumstances. Hal and Noll, being ambitious, had both felt dissatisfied, of late, with their surroundings and prospects, and both had received parental permission to better themselves if they could. So our two young friends, after many talks, and especially with Sergeant Wright, had decided to serve at least three years in the regular army by way of preliminary training.

Unfortunately, few American youths, comparatively speaking, are aware of the splendid training that the United States Army offers to a young American. The Army offers splendid grounding for the young man who prefers to serve but a single enlistment and then return to civil life. But it also offers a solidly good career to the young man who enlists and remains with the colors until he is retired after thirty years of continuous service.

Both Hal and Noll had looked thoroughly into the question, and each was now convinced that the Army offered him the best place in life. Both boys had very definite ideas of what they expected to accomplish by entering the Army, as will appear presently.

Tip—even Tip Branders—had something of an ambition in life. So far as he had done anything, Tip had “trained” with a gang of young hoodlums who were “useful” to the political machine in one of the tough wards of the little city. Tip’s ultimate idea was to “get a city job,” at good pay, and do little or nothing for the pay.

But Tip dreaded a civil service examination—knew, in fact, that he could not pass one. In most American cities, to-day, an honorably discharged enlisted man from the Army or Navy is allowed to take an appointment to a city position without civil service examination, or else to do so on a lower marking than would be accepted from any other candidate for a city job.

So, curiously enough, Tip had decided to serve in the United States Army. One term would be enough to serve his purpose.

Tip, too, had kept his resolve a secret—even from his mother.

As Hal and Noll, Jud and Tom strolled along they came up with Tip Branders.

"So this is you, you little freshy!" growled Tip, halting suddenly, and close to Jud. "Now I'll give ye the thrashing I promised yesterday."

His big fist shot out, making a grab for young Jeffers.

But Hal Overton caught the wrist of that hand, and shoved it back.

"That doesn't look exactly manly in you, Branders," remarked Hal quietly.

"Oh, it doesn't, hey?" roared Tip. "What have you got to say about it?"

"Nothing in particular," admitted Hal pleasantly. "Nothing, except that I'd rather see you tackle some one nearer your own size."

"Would, hey?" roared Tip. "O. K!"

With that he swung suddenly, and so unexpectedly that the blow caught Hal Overton unawares, sending him to the sidewalk.

"I believe I'll take a small hand in this," murmured Noll Terry, starting to take off his coat.

But Hal was up in a twinkling.

"Leave this to me, please, Noll," he begged, and sailed in.

Tip Branders was waiting, with an ugly grin on his face. He was far bigger than Hal, and stronger, too. Yet, for the first few moments, Tip had all he could do to ward off Hal's swift, clever blows.

Then Tip swung around swiftly, taking the aggressive.

It seemed like a bad mistake, for now Hal suddenly drove in a blow that landed on Brand-er's nose, drawing the blood.

"Now, I'll fix ye for that!" roared Tip, after backing off for an instant.

Just as he was about to charge again the big bully felt a strong grip on his collar, while a deep, firm voice warned him:

"Don't do anything of the sort, Branders, or I'll have to summon an officer to take you in."

Tip wheeled, to find himself looking into the grizzled face of Chief of Police Blake. Tip often bragged of his political "pull," but he knew he had none with this chief.

"I got a right to smash this fellow," blustered Tip. "He hit me."

"I'll wager you hit him first, though, or else gave young Overton good cause for hitting you," smiled the chief. "I know Overton, and he's the kind of boy his neighbors can vouch for. I don't know as much good of you. But I'll tell you, Tip, how you can best win my good opinion. Take a walk—a good, brisk walk—straight down the street. And start now!"

Something in the police chief's voice told Tip that it would be well to obey. He did so.

"Too many young fellows like him on the

street," observed Chief Blake, with a quiet smile. "Good morning, boys."

At the next corner Hal and Noll turned.

"Oh, you're going to see Sergeant Wright?" asked Jud.

"Yes," nodded Hal. "Our last visit to him."

"Then you won't want us along," said Jud sensibly. "But say, we wish you barrels of luck—honest—in the new life you're going into."

"Thank you," laughed Hal good-humoredly, holding out his hand.

"Send me a brass button soon, one that you've worn on your uniform blouse, will you?" begged Jud.

"Yes," agreed Hal, "if there's nothing in the regulations against it."

"And you, Noll? Will you do as much for me?" begged Tom.

"Surely, on the same conditions," promised Noll Terry.

"But we haven't succeeded in getting into the service yet, you must remember," Hal warned them.

"Oh, shucks!" retorted Jud. "I wish I were as sure of anything that I want. The recruiting officer'll be tickled to death when he sees you two walking in on him."

"I hope you're a real, true prophet, Jud," replied Hal, with a wistful smile.

Neither of these two younger boys had any idea how utterly Hal Overton had set his heart on entering the service, nor why. The reader will presently discover more about the surging "why."

On one of the side streets the boys paused before the door of a cozy, little cottage in which lived Sergeant Wright and the wife who had been with him nearly the whole of his time in the service.

Ere they could ring the bell the door opened, and Sergeant Wright, U. S. Army, retired, stood before them, holding out his hand.

"Well, boys," was the kindly greeting of this fine-looking, middle-aged man, "have you settled the whole matter at home?"

"Yes," nodded Hal happily. "We go to New York, to-morrow, to try our luck with the recruiting officer."

"Come right in, boys, and we'll have our final talk about the good old Army," cried the retired sergeant heartily.

It was that same afternoon that Tip Branders next espied Jud and Tom coming down a street. Tip darted into a doorway, intent on lying in wait for the pair.

As they neared his place of hiding, however, Tip heard Jud and Tom talking of something that changed his plan.

“What’s that?” echoed Tip to himself, straining his hearing.

“Say,” breathed Tom Andrews fervently, “wouldn’t it be fine if we could go to New York to-morrow morning, too, and see Hal and Noll sworn into the United States Army?”

Tip held his breath, listening for more. He heard enough to put him in possession of practically all of the plans of Hal and Noll.

“Oho!” chuckled Tip, as he strode away from the place later. “So that pair of boobs are going to try for the Army. Oh, I daresay they’ll get in. But so will I—and in the same company with them. I wouldn’t have missed this for anything. I’ll be the thorn in Hal Overton’s side the little while that he’ll be in the service! I’ve more than to-day’s business to settle with that stuck-up dude!”

All of which will soon appear and be made plain.

CHAPTER II

AT THE RECRUITING OFFICE

THE solemn time came the following morning.

Both Hal and Noll were "only children," or, at least, so thought their mothers.

Messrs. Overton and Terry, the elders, gave their sons' hands a last strong grip. No good advice was offered by either father at parting. That had already been attended to.

Naturally the boys' mothers cried a good bit over them. Both mothers, in fact, had wanted to go over to New York with their sons. But the fathers had objected that this would only prolong the pain of parting, and that soldiers in the bud should not be unfitted for their beginnings by tears.

So Hal and Noll met at the station, to take an early morning train. There were no relatives to see them off. Early as the hour was, though, Jud Jeffers and Tom Andrews had made a point of being on hand.

"We wanted to see you start," explained Jud, his face beaming and eyes wistful with longing. "We didn't know what train you'd take, so we've been here since half-past six."

"We may be back by early afternoon," laughed Hal.

"Not you two!" declared Jud positively. "The recruiting officer will jump right up, shake hands with you, and drag you over to where you sign the Army rolls."

The train came along in time to put a stop to a long conversation.

As the two would-be soldiers stepped up to the train platform Jud and Tom did their best to volley them with cheers.

Noll blushed, darting into a car as quickly as he could, and sitting on the opposite side of the train from these noisy young admirers.

Hal, however, good-humoredly waved his hand from a window as the train pulled out. Then, with a very solemn face, all of a sudden, young Overton crossed and seated himself beside his chum.

Neither boy carried any baggage whatever. If they failed to get into the Army they would soon be home again. If they succeeded in enlisting, then the Army authorities would furnish all the baggage to be needed.

"Take your last look at the old town, Hal," Noll urged gravely, as the train began to move faster. "It may be years before we see the good old place again."

"Oh, keep a stiff upper lip, Noll," smiled Hal,

though he, also, felt rather blue for the moment. "Our folks will be down to the recruit drilling place to see us, soon, if we succeed in getting enrolled."

It hurt both boys a bit, as long as any part of their home city remained in sight. Each tried bravely, however, to look as though going away from home had been a frequent occurrence in their lives.

By the time that they were ten miles on their way both youngsters had recovered their spirits. Indeed, now they were looking forward with almost feverish eagerness to their meeting the recruiting officer.

"I hope the Army surgeon doesn't find anything wrong with our physical condition," said Hal, at last.

"Dr. Brooks didn't," replied Noll, as confidently as though that settled it.

"But Dr. Brooks has never been an Army surgeon," returned Hal. "He may not know all the fine points that Army surgeons know."

"Well we'll know before the day is over," replied Noll, with a catching of his breath. "Then, of course, we don't know whether the Army is at present taking boys under twenty-one."

"The law allows it," declared Hal stoutly.

"Yes; but you remember Sergeant Wright

told us, fairly, that sometimes, when the right sort of recruits are coming along fast, the recruiting officers shut down on taking any minors."

"I imagine," predicted Hal, "that much more will depend upon how we happen, individually, to impress the recruiting officer."

In this Hal Overton was very close to being right.

The ride of more than two hours ended at last, bringing the young would-be soldiers to the ferry on the Jersey side. As they crossed the North River both boys admitted to themselves that they were becoming a good deal more nervous.

"We'll get a Broadway surface car, and that will take us right up to Madison Square," proposed Noll.

"It would take us too long," negatived Hal. "We can save a lot of time by taking the Sixth Avenue 'L' uptown and walking across to Madison Square."

"You're in a hurry to have it over with?" laughed Noll, but there was a slight tremor in his voice.

"I'm in a hurry to know my fate," admitted Hal.

Oliver Terry had been in New York but once before. Hal, by virtue of his superiority in

having made four visits to New York, led the way straight to the elevated railroad. They climbed the stairs, and were just in time to board a train.

A few minutes later they got out at Twenty-third Street, crossed to Fifth Avenue and Broadway, then made their way swiftly over to Madison Square.

"There's the place, over there!" cried Noll, suddenly seizing Hal's arm and dragging him along. "There's an officer and a man, and the soldier is holding a banner. It has something on it that says something about recruits for the Army."

"The man you call an officer is a non-commissioned officer—a sergeant, in fact," Hal replied. "Don't you see the chevrons on his sleeve?"

"That's so," Noll admitted slowly. "Cavalry, at that. His chevrons and facings are yellow. It was his fine uniform that made me take him for an officer."

"We'll go up to the sergeant and ask him where the recruiting office is," Hal continued.

Certainly the sergeant looked "fine" enough to be an officer. His uniform was immaculate, rich-looking and faultless. Both sergeant and private wore the olive khaki, with handsome visored caps of the same material.

The early April forenoon was somewhat chilly, yet the benches in the center of the square were more than half-filled by men plainly "down on their luck." Some of these men, of course, were hopelessly besotted or vicious, and Uncle Sam had no use for any of these in his Army uniform. There were other men, however, on the seats, who looked like good and useful men who had met with hard times. Most of these men on the benches had not breakfasted, and had no assurance that they would lunch or dine on that day.

It was to the better elements among these men that the sergeant and the private soldier were intended to appeal. Yet the sergeant was not seeking unwilling recruits; he addressed no man who did not first speak to him.

In the tidy, striking uniforms, their well-built bodies, their well-fed appearance and their whole air of well-being, these two enlisted men of the regular army must have presented a powerful, if mute, appeal to the hungry unfortunate ones on the benches.

"Good morning, Sergeant," spoke Hal, as soon as the two chums had reached the Army pair.

"Good morning, sir," replied the sergeant.

"You're in the recruiting service?" Hal continued.

“Yes, sir.”

Always the invariable “sir” with which the careful soldier answers citizens. In the Army men are taught the use of that “sir,” and to look upon all citizens as their employers.

“Then no doubt you will direct us to the recruiting office in this neighborhood?” Hal went on.

“Certainly, sir,” answered the sergeant, and wheeling still further around he pointed north across the square to where the office was situated.

“You can hardly miss it, sir, with the orderly standing outside,” said the sergeant, smiling.

“No, indeed,” Hal agreed. “Thank you very much, Sergeant.”

“You’re welcome, sir. May I inquire if you are considering enlisting?”

“Both of us are,” Hal nodded.

“Glad to hear it, sir,” the sergeant continued, looking both boys over with evident approval.

“You look like the clean, solid, sensible, right sort that we’re looking for in the Army. I wish you both the best of good luck.”

“Thank you,” Hal acknowledged. “Good morning, Sergeant.”

“Good morning, sir,”

Still that “sir” to the citizen. The sergeant would drop it, as far as these two boys were

concerned, if they entered the service and became his subordinates.

It seemed to Hal and Noll as if they could not get over the ground fast enough until they reached that doorway where the orderly stood. The orderly directed them how to reach the office upstairs, and both boys, after thanking him, proceeded rapidly to higher regions.

They soon found themselves before the door. It stood ajar. Inside sat a sergeant at a flat-top desk. He, too, was of the cavalry. There were also two privates in the room.

Doffing their hats Hal and Noll entered the room. Overton led the way straight to the sergeant's desk.

"Good morning, Sergeant. We have come to see whether we can enlist."

"How old were you on your last birthday?" inquired the sergeant, eyeing Hal keenly.

"Eighteen, Sergeant."

"And you?" turning to Noll.

"Seventeen," Noll replied.

"You are too young, I'm sorry to say," replied the sergeant to Noll.

Then, turning to Hal, he added:

"You may be accepted."

"But I've got another birthday coming very soon," interjected Noll.

"How soon?"

"To-morrow."

"You'll be eighteen to-morrow?" questioned the sergeant.

"Yes, sir."

"That will be all right, then," nodded the sergeant. "You won't need to be sworn in before to-morrow. You have both of you parents living?"

"Yes, sir," Hal answered, this time.

"It is not necessary, or usual, to say 'sir,' when answering a non-commissioned officer," the sergeant informed them. "Say 'sir,' always, when addressing a commissioned officer or a citizen."

"Thank you," Hal acknowledged.

"Now, you have the consent of your parents to enlist?"

"Yes, Sergeant."

"Both of you?"

"Yes."

"Aldridge!"

One of the pair of very spruce-looking privates in the room wheeled about.

"Furnish these young men with application blanks, and take them over to the high desk."

Having said this the sergeant turned back to some papers that he had been examining.

"You will fill out these papers," Private Aldridge explained to the boys, after he had led

them to the high desk. "I think all the questions are plain enough. If there are any you don't understand then ask me."

It was a race between Hal and Noll to see which could get a pen in his hand first. Then they began to write.

The first question, naturally, was as to the full name of the applicant; then followed his present age and other questions of personal history.

For some time both pens flew over the paper or paused as a new question was being considered.

When he came to the question as to which arm of the service was preferred by the applicant Noll turned to Hal to whisper:

"Is it still the infantry?" young Terry asked.

"Still and always the infantry," Hal nodded.

"All right," half sighed Noll. "I'm almost wishing for the cavalry, though, so I could ride a horse."

"The infantry is best for our plans," Hal replied.

When they had finished making out their papers Hal and Noll went back to the sergeant's desk.

"Do we hand these to you?" Hal asked.

"Yes," said the sergeant, taking both papers. He ran his eyes over them hurriedly, then rose

and passed into an inner office. When he came out all he said was:

“Take seats over there until you’re wanted.”

Two or three minutes later a buzzer sounded over the sergeant’s head. Rising, he entered the inner room.

“Our time’s come, now, I guess,” whispered Noll.

“Or else something else is going to happen,” replied Hal, smiling. “You and I are not the only two problems with which the Army concerns itself.”

Noll’s guess was right, however. The sergeant speedily returned to the outer office and crossed over to the boys, who rose.

“Lieutenant Shackleton will see you,” announced the sergeant. “Step right into his office. Stand erect and facing him. Use the word, ‘sir,’ when answering him, and be very respectful in all your replies. Let him do all the talking.”

“We understand, thank you,” nodded Hal.

The sergeant, who had his cap in his hand, turned to leave the office for a few moments on other business. As he was going out he nearly bumped into a heavily-built young fellow who was entering.

Hal Overton had reached the door leading into the lieutenant’s office and pulled it open.

Just as he did so he heard a rather familiar voice behind him demand:

"Where's the officer in charge?"

"In that office," replied one of the soldiers, pointing.

The newcomer did not stop to thank the soldier, but sprang toward the door that Hal had just opened.

"Here, you kids can stand aside until a man gets through with his business in there," exclaimed Tip Branders, gripping Hal by the shoulders and swinging him aside.

CHAPTER III

THE ORDEAL OF EXAMINATION

HAL OVERTON was so astonished that he offered no resistance to the bully from home.

Instead, Hal and Noll paused by the door, while Tip, with a confident leer on his face, strode into the inner office.

Lieutenant Shackleton, a man of twenty-eight, in blue fatigue uniform, with the single bar of the first lieutenant on his shoulder-straps, looked up quickly and in some amazement.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I've come to see you about enlisting in the Army," continued Tip, who, with his hat still on, was marching up to the desk.

"Take off your hat."

"Eh? Huh?"

"Take off your hat!" came the repeated order, with a good deal more of emphasis.

"Hey? Oh, cert. Anything to oblige," assented Tip, with a sheepish grin, as he removed his hat.

"Is your name Overton?" asked the recruiting officer, glancing at the papers before him.

"Naw, nothing like it," returned Tip easily.

"Or, Terry?"

"Them two boobs is outside," returned Tip, with evident scorn. "I told 'em to stand aside until I went in and had my rag-chew out with you."

Lieutenant Shackleton flashed an angry look at Branders, though a keen reader of faces would have known that this experienced recruiting officer was trying hard to conceal a smile. The lieutenant had dealt with many of these "tough" applicants.

"Orderly!" rasped out the lieutenant.

Private Aldridge appeared in the doorway, standing at attention.

"Orderly, I understand that this man wishes to enlist——"

"That's dead right," nodded Tip encouragingly.

"But his application has not been received by me," continued the lieutenant, ignoring the interruption. "Take him outside and let Sergeant Wayburn look him over first. Also ask the sergeant to inform this man as to the proper way to approach and address an officer."

"Very good, sir," replied Private Aldridge. He tried to catch Tip's eye, but Branders was not looking at him, so the soldier crossed over to Branders, resting a hand on his arm.

"Come with me," requested the soldier.

"Hey?" asked Tip.

"My man, go with that orderly," cried Lieutenant Shackleton, in an annoyed tone.

"Me? Oh, all right," nodded Tip, and went out with the soldier.

"Overton! Terry!" called the recruiting officer.

"Here, sir," answered Hal, as both boys entered the room.

"One of you close the door then come here," directed Lieutenant Shackleton.

Noll closed the door, after which both boys advanced to the roll-top desk behind which the lieutenant sat.

"You are Henry Overton and Oliver Terry?" asked the officer.

"Yes, sir," Hal answered.

"And these are you applications?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have filled them out truthfully, in every detail?"

"Yes, sir."

"You, Overton, are already eighteen?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you, Terry, will be eighteen years old to-morrow?"

"Yes, sir——" from Noll.

The lieutenant looked them both over keenly, as if to make up his own mind about their ages.

"May I speak, sir?" queried Hal.

"Yes."

"To satisfy any doubt about our ages, sir, we have brought with us copies of our birth certificates, both certified to by the city clerk at home."

"You're intelligent lads," exclaimed the officer, with a gratified smile. "You go at things in the right way. Be good enough to turn over the certificates to me."

Hal took some papers from his pocket, passing two of them over to the recruiting officer, who examined the certificates swiftly.

"All regular," he declared. "Terry, of course, if he passes, cannot be sworn in until tomorrow. You have other papers there?"

"Yes, sir," Hal admitted. "The consent for our joining, signed by both our fathers and mothers, since we are under twenty-one."

"But I cannot know, until I have ascertained, that these are the genuine signatures of your parents. That investigation will take a little time."

"Pardon me, sir," Hal answered, laying the two remaining papers before the officer, "but you will find both papers witnessed under the seal of a notary public, who states that our parents are personally known to him."

"Well, well, you are bright lads—good enough

to make soldiers of," laughed Lieutenant Shackleton almost gleefully, as he scanned the added papers.

"May I speak, sir?"

"Yes."

"We can't claim credit for bringing these papers. We are well acquainted with a retired sergeant of the Army, who suggested that these papers, in their present form, would save us a lot of bother."

"Then you don't deserve any of the credit?"

"No, sir."

"You deserve a higher credit, then, for you are both honest lads."

Again the lieutenant turned to look them over keenly, sizing them up, as it were. Both were plainly more than five-feet-four, and so would not be rejected on account of height. They seemed like good, solid youngsters, too.

"Smoke cigarettes?" suddenly shot out the lieutenant.

"No, sir!"

"Smoke anything else, or chew tobacco? Or drink alcoholic beverages?"

"We have never done any of these things, sir," Hal replied.

"I see that you express a preference for the infantry," continued the recruiting officer.

"Yes, sir," Hal replied.

"I am almost sorry for that," continued the officer. "I would like to see two lads of your evident caliber going into my own arm of the service—the cavalry."

"We have chosen the infantry, sir," Hal explained, "because we will have more leisure time there than in the cavalry or artillery."

"Looking for easy berths?" asked Lieutenant Shackleton, with a suddenly suspicious ring to his voice.

"No, sir," Hal rejoined. "May I explain, sir?"

"Yes; go ahead."

"We both of us have hopes, sir, if we can get into the Army, that we may be able to rise to be commissioned officers. We have learned that there is less to do in the infantry, ordinarily, and that we would therefore have more time in the infantry for study to fit ourselves to take examinations for officer's commissions."

"Then, to save you from possible future disappointment, I had better be very frank with you about the chances of winning commissions from the ranks," said the lieutenant. "In the Army we have some excellent officers who have risen from the ranks. Each year a few enlisted men are promoted to be commissioned officers. The examination, however, is a very stiff one. Out of the applicants each year more en-

listed men are rejected than are promoted. The difficulty of the examination causes most enlisted men to fail."

"Thank you, sir. We have thought of all that, and have looked over the nature of the examinations given enlisted men who seek to be officers," Hal replied. "We know the examinations are very hard, but we have twelve years if need be in which to prepare ourselves for the examination. Enlisted men, so I am told, may apply for commissions up to the age of thirty."

"Yes; that is right," nodded the lieutenant. "But how much schooling have you behind you?"

"We have each had two years in High School, sir."

"On that basis you will both have hard times to prepare yourselves for officers' examinations. However, with great application, you may make it—if you achieve also sufficiently good records as enlisted men."

This explanation being sufficient, Lieutenant Shackleton paused, then went on:

"As you are unusually in earnest about enlisting I fancy that you want to hear the surgeon's verdict as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir, if you please," replied Hal.

"Orderly!"

One of the two soldiers entered. Lieutenant

Shackleton made some entries on the application papers, then handed them to the soldier.

"Orderly, take these young men to the surgeon at once."

"Yes, sir. Come this way, please."

Hal and Noll were again conducted into the outer office. The sergeant had returned by this time and was at his desk. Over at the high desk stood Tip Branders, making out his application.

"Oh, we're it, aren't we?" demanded Tip, looking around with a scowl at the chums. "You freshies!"

"Be silent," ordered the sergeant looking up briskly.

"Well, those two kids——" began Tip. But the sergeant, though a middle-aged man, showed himself agile enough to reach Tip Branders' side in three swift, long bounds.

"Young man, either conduct yourself properly, or get out of here," ordered the sergeant point-blank.

Muttering something under his breath, Tip turned back to his writing, at which he was making poor headway, while the orderly led Hal and Noll down the corridor, halting and knocking at another door.

"Come in!" called a voice.

"Lieutenant Shackleton's compliments, sir, and two applicants to be examined, sir."

"Very good, Orderly," replied Captain Wayburn, assistant surgeon, Army Medical Corps, as he received the papers from the orderly. The latter then left the room, closing the door behind him.

"You are Overton and Terry?" questioned Captain Wayburn, eyeing the papers, then turning to the chums, who answered in the affirmative.

Captain Wayburn, being a medical officer of the Army, wore shoulder straps with a green ground. At the ends of each strap rested the two bars that proclaimed his rank of captain. Being a staff officer, Captain Wayburn wore black trousers, instead of blue, beneath his blue fatigue blouse. Moreover, the black trousers of the staff carried no broad side stripe along the leg. The side stripe is always in evidence along the outer leg side of the blue trousers of the line officer, and the color of the stripe denotes to which arm of the service the officer belongs—a white stripe denotes the infantry officer, while a yellow stripe distinguishes the cavalry and a red stripe the artillery officer.

Captain Wayburn now laid out two other sets of papers on his desk. These were the blanks for the surgeon's report on an applicant for enlistment.

At first this examination didn't seem to

amount to much. The surgeon began by looking Hal Overton's scalp over, next examining his face, neck and back of head. Then he took a look at Hal's teeth, which he found to be perfect.

"Stand where you are. Read this line of letters to me," ordered the surgeon, stepping across the room to a card on which were ranged several rows of printed letters of different sizes.

Hal read the line off perfectly.

"Read the line above."

Hal did so. He read all of the lines, to the smallest, in fact, without an error.

"There's nothing the matter with your vision," remarked Captain Wayburn, in a pleased tone. "Now tell me—promptly—what color is this?"

The surgeon held up a skein of yarn.

"Red," announced Hal, without an instant's hesitation.

"This one?"

"Green."

"And this?"

"Blue."

And so on. Hal missed with none of the colors.

"Go to that chair in the corner, Overton, and strip yourself, piling your clothing neatly on the chair. Terry, come here."

Noll went through similar tests with equal success. By the time he had finished Hal was stripped. Now came the real examination. Hal's heart and other organs were examined; his skin and body were searched for blemishes. He was made to run and do various other exercises. After this the surgeon again listened to his heart from various points of examination. Finally Hal was told to lie down on a cot. Now, the examination of the heart was made over again in this position. It was mostly Greek to the boy. When the examination was nearly over Noll was ordered to strip and take his turn.

When it was over Captain Wayburn turned to them to say:

"If I pronounced you young men absolutely flawless in a physical sense, it wouldn't be much of an exaggeration. You are just barely over the one hundred and twenty pound weight, but that is all that can be expected at your age."

"You pass us, sir," asked Hal eagerly.

"Most decidedly. As soon as Terry is dressed I'll hand you each your papers to take back to the recruiting officer."

Five minutes later Hal and Noll returned to the main waiting room.

"Pass?" inquired the sergeant, with friendly interest.

"Yes," nodded Hal.

Tip Branders was sitting in a chair, a dark scowl on his face.

"Orderly, take Branders to the surgeon, now," continued the sergeant, and Tip disappeared. Then the sergeant knocked at the door of the lieutenant's office and entered after receiving the officer's permission. He came out in a moment, holding the door open.

"Overton and Terry, the lieutenant will see you now."

Hal and Noll entered, handing their papers back to Lieutenant Shackleton, who glanced briefly at the surgeon's reports.

"I don't see much difficulty about your enlisting," smiled the officer. "I congratulate you both."

"We're delighted, sir," said Noll simply.

"Now, Overton, I can let you sign, provisionally, to-day but I can't accept your friend, Terry, until to-morrow, when he will have reached the proper age for enlisting. This may seem like a trivial thing to you, but Terry is just one day short of the age, and the regulations provide that an officer who knowingly enlists a recruit below the proper age is to be dismissed from the service. Now, if you prefer, Overton, you can delay enlisting until to-morrow, so as to enter on the same date with your friend."

"I'd prefer that, sir," admitted Hal.

“You are both in earnest about enlisting?”

“Indeed we are, sir,” breathed Noll fervently.

“I believe you,” nodded the officer. “Now, have you money enough for a hotel bed and meals until to-morrow forenoon?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then be here at nine o’clock to-morrow morning, sharp, and I’ll sign you both on the rolls of the Army. Now, furnish me with home references, and, especially, the name of your last employer. These will be investigated by telegraph. Also, are you acquainted with the chief of police in your home city?”

Hal and Noll answered these questions.

Then, having nothing pressing on his hands for the moment, Lieutenant Shackleton offered the boys much sound and wholesome advice as to the way to conduct themselves in the Army. He laid especial stress upon truthfulness, which is the keystone of the service. He warned them against bad habits of all kinds, and told them to pick their friends with care, both in and out of the service.

“In particular,” continued the lieutenant, “I want to warn you against contracting the ‘guard-house habit.’ That is what we call it when a soldier gets in the habit of committing petty breaches of discipline such as will land him in the guard-house for a term of confine-

ment for twenty-four hours or more. The 'guard-house habit' has spoiled hundreds of men, who, but for that first confinement, would have made admirable soldiers. The enlisted man with the 'guard-house habit' is as useless and hopeless as the tramp or the petty thief in civil life."

It was an excellent talk all the way through. Both boys listened respectfully and appreciatively. It struck them that Lieutenant Shackleton was giving them a large amount of his time. They learned, later, that a competent officer is always willing and anxious to talk with his men upon questions of discipline, duty and efficiency. It is one of the things that the officer is expected and paid to do.

By the time they came out Tip was just returning from the surgeon's examination.

"You freshies needn't think ye're the only ones that passed," growled Tip in a low voice, as he passed.

Neither chum paid any heed to Branders. Somehow, as long as he kept his hands at his sides, Branders didn't seem worth noticing.

"Make it?" asked the sergeant at the street door.

"Yes; we sign to-morrow, if our references are all right," Hal nodded happily.

With a sudden recollection that soldiers must

hold themselves erect, Hal and Noll braced their shoulders until they thought they looked and carried themselves very much as the sergeant did. They kept this pose until they had turned the corner into Broadway.

"Whoop!" exploded the usually quiet Noll Terry unexpectedly.

"What's wrong, old fellow?" asked Hal quickly.

"Nothing! Everything's right, and we're soldiers at last!" cried Noll, his eyes shining.

"At least, we shall be to-morrow, if all goes well," rejoined Hal.

"Oh, nonsense! Everything is going to go right, now. It can't go any other way."

As he spoke, Noll turned to cross Broadway at the next corner.

Hal made a pounce forward, seizing his comrade by an arm. Then he backed like a flash, dragging Noll back to the sidewalk with him. Even at that a moving automobile brushed Noll's clothes, leaving a layer of dirt on them.

"Things will go wrong, if you don't watch where you're going," cried Hal rather excitedly. "Noll, Noll, don't try to walk on clouds, but remember you're on Broadway."

"Let's get off of Broadway, then," begged young Terry. "I'm so tickled that I want a chance to enjoy my thoughts."

"We'll cross and go down Broadway, then," Hal proposed. "I have the address of a hotel with rates low enough to suit our treasury, and it's some blocks below here."

"Say," muttered Noll, "of all the things I ever heard of! Think of Tip Branders wanting to serve the Flag!"

The boys talked of this puzzle, mainly, until they reached their street and crossed once more to go to the hotel. They registered, went to their room, and here Noll put in the next twenty minutes in making his clothes look presentable again.

"If you've got that done, let's go downstairs," proposed happy Hal. "I'm hungry enough to scare the bill of fare clear off the table."

As they descended into the lobby Hal suddenly touched Noll's arm and stood still.

"I guess Tip is going to stay right with us," whispered Overton in his chum's ear. "That's Tip's mother over there in the chair. She and her son must be stopping at this hotel."

"They surely are," nodded Noll, "for there's Tip himself just coming in."

Neither mother nor son noted the presence of the chums near by.

Tip hurried up to his mother, a grin on his not very handsome face.

“Well, old lady,” was that son’s greeting,
“I’ve gone and done it.”

“You don’t mean that you’ve gotten into any trouble, do you, Tip?” asked his mother apprehensively.

“Trouble—nothing!” retorted Tip eloquently.
“Naw! I’ve been around to the rookie shed and got passed as a soldier in the Regular Army.”

“What?” gasped his mother paling.

“Now, that ain’t nothing so fierce,” almost growled Tip. “But there is a fool rule—**me** being under twenty-one—that you’ve got to go and give your consent. So that’s the cloth that’s cut for you this afternoon, old lady.”

“Oh, oh, oh!” cried Mrs. Branders, sinking back in her chair and covering her face with her hands. “What have I ever done that I should be disgraced by having a son of mine going to—enlist in the Army!”

CHAPTER IV

MRS. BRANDERS GETS A NEW VIEW

THE chums waited to hear no more. It was none of their affair, so they slipped into one of the adjacent dining rooms.

Hal's eyes were flashing with indignation over Mrs. Brander's remark.

Noll, on the other hand, was smiling quietly.

"That must be a severe blow to Mrs. Branders," murmured Noll aloud, as the boys slipped into their chairs at table. "To think of gentle Tip going off into anything as rough and brutal as the Army! And poor little Tip raised so tenderly as a pet!"

As it afterwards turned out, however, Mrs. Branders, after offering her son a present of a hundred dollars to stay out of the Army, had at last tearfully given her consent to his becoming a soldier.

She even went to the recruiting office that afternoon with Tip, and gave a reluctant consent to her son's enlistment.

"Be here at nine o'clock, sharp, to-morrow morning," directed Lieutenant Shackleton.

It was doubtful if either youngster slept very well that night. Both were too full of thoughts

of the Army and of the service. When Hal did dream it was of Indians and Filipinos.

Both were up early, and had breakfast out of the way in record time—and then they hurried to Madison Square. They reached there ten minutes ahead of time.

The sergeant, however, came along five minutes later, and admitted them to the recruiting office.

Hardly had they stepped inside when Tip and his mother also appeared. Then came the other enlisted men stationed at this office. Punctually at the stroke of nine Lieutenant Shackleton entered, lifted his uniform cap to Mrs. Branders and entered his own inner office.

“Now you kids will get orders to skin back home,” jeered Tip, in a low tone, as he glanced over at Hal and Noll.

“No pleasantries of that sort here,” directed the sergeant, glancing up from his desk.

The door of the inner office opened, and Lieutenant Shackleton stepped out.

“Overton and Terry, your references prove to be absolutely good. I will enlist you presently.”

Then the officer moved over to where Tip Branders and his mother sat. Tip rose awkwardly.

“Branders, I’m sorry to say we must decline

your enlistment," announced the recruiting officer, in a low tone.

"Wot's that?" demanded Tip unbelievably.

"I find myself unable to accept you as a recruit in the Army," replied the lieutenant.

"Why, wot's the matter?" demanded Tip, thunderstruck. "Didn't I get by the sawbones all right?"

"If you mean the surgeon, yes," replied the recruiting officer. "But I regret to say that we do not receive satisfactory accounts of you from the home town."

"Wot's the matter? Somebody out home trying to give me the crisscross?" demanded Tip indignantly.

"We do not receive a satisfactory account of your character, Branders, and therefore you are not eligible for enlistment," went on Shackleton. "Madam, I am extremely sorry, but the regulations allow me to pursue no other course in the matter. I cannot enlist your son."

"See here, officer——" began Mrs. Branders hoarsely, as she got upon her feet.

"When addressing Mr. Shackleton, call him 'lieutenant,' not 'officer,'" murmured one of the orderlies in her ear.

"You mind your own business," flashed Mrs. Branders, turning her face briefly to the or-

derly. Then she wheeled, giving her whole attention to the lieutenant.

"See here, officer, do you mean to say that my boy ain't good enough to get into the Army?"

"I am sorry, madam, but the report we receive of his character isn't satisfactory," answered Shackleton quietly.

"What? My boy ain't good enough to go with the loafers and roughs in the Army?" cried Mrs. Branders angrily. "He's too good for 'em—a heap sight too good for any such low company! But s'posing Tip has been just a little frisky sometimes, what has that got to do with his being a soldier? I thought you wanted young fellows to fight—not pray!"

"The soldier who can do both makes the better soldier, madam," replied the lieutenant, feeling sorry for the mother's humiliation. "And now I will say good morning to you and your son, madam, for I am very busy to-day. Overton and Terry, come into my office."

Before turning, Lieutenant Shackleton bowed to Mrs. Branders as gracefully and courteously as he could have done to the President's wife. Then he started for his office, leaving Mrs. Branders and Tip to depart in bewilderment and anger.

Hal and Noll followed the lieutenant, trying

not to let their faces betray any feeling over Tip's troubles.

"You still wish to enlist?" asked Shackleton, turning to the waiting lads, after he had seated himself.

"Yes, sir," answered both.

"Then you will sign the rolls," directed the recruiting officer, passing papers forward, dipping a pen in ink and passing it to Hal.

Hal signed, slowly, with a solemn feeling. It was Noll's turn next.

"I will now administer the oath," continued Lieutenant Shackleton gravely, as he rose at his desk. "Raise your right hand, Overton, and repeat after me."

This was the oath of service that Hal repeated:

"I Henry Overton, do solemnly swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the United States of America; that I will serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies whomsoever; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States, and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to the rules and articles of war.' "

Then Noll took the same oath.

"You have already signed the same oath as a part of your enlistment contract," continued Lieutenant Shackleton. "I have now to certify

that you have taken the oath and signed before me."

Seating himself once more the recruiting officer certified in the following form on each set of papers:

"Subscribed and duly sworn to before me this
—day of—, A. D.—"

"THOMAS P. SHACKLETON,
"First Lieutenant, 17th Cavalry,
"Recruiting Officer."

"That is all," finished the recruiting officer. "You are now recruits in the United States Army. I wish you both all happiness and success. You will take your further orders from my sergeant, or from the corporal to whom he turns you over. You will probably find yourself at the recruit rendezvous at Bedloe's Island in time for dinner to-day."

Touching a button on his desk the lieutenant waited until the sergeant entered.

"Sergeant, turn these men over to Corporal Dodds. Come back in ten minutes for the papers."

"Very good, sir."

The sergeant led them down the corridor, opening a door and leading the way inside.

"Corporal Dodds, here are two recruits. Take care of them until I bring the papers."

"Very good, Sergeant."

The door closed.

"Help yourselves to chairs, or stand and look out of the window, if you'd rather," invited Corporal Dodds, who, himself, was seated at a small desk.

Hal and Noll tried sitting down at first. This soon became so irksome that they rose and went to one of the windows.

Corporal Dodds said nothing until the door opened once more, and the sergeant entered with an envelope.

"Here are the papers for Privates Overton and Terry. You are directed to see that the young men go with you on the eleven o'clock ferry to Bedloe's Island. You will report with these recruits to the post adjutant as usual."

"Very good, Sergeant," replied Corporal Dodds, and again the boys were alone with their present guide.

To the raw young recruits it was a tremendously solemn day, but to the corporal, it was simply a matter of dry routine.

"Ten-fifteen," yawned the corporal, at last. "Come along, rookies; nothing like being on time—in the Army, especially."

"Rookie" is the term by which a new recruit is designated in Army slang. It is a term of mild derision.

Corporal Dodds paused long enough at the recruiting office to turn over his key to the sergeant; then he led the way to the street, across to the Sixth Avenue Elevated road, and thence they embarked on a train bound down town.

All the way to the Battery Corporal Dodds did not furnish his pair of recruits with more than a dozen words by way of conversation.

But neither Hal nor Noll felt much like talking. Though either would have died sooner than admit it, each was suffering, just then from acute homesickness, and also from a secret dread that the Army might not turn out to be as rosy as they had painted it in their imagination.

"This way to the Army ferry," directed Corporal Dodds, leading them across the Battery.

Once aboard a small steamer that flew the flag of the Quartermaster's Department, United States Army, Corporal Dodds watched his two young rookies as though he suspected they would desert if they got a chance.

After the ferry had left the slip, however, Dodds paid no more heed to them. He at least left them free to end it all by jumping over into the bay, if they wished to do so.

Finding that he was under no restrictions, Private Hal Overton, United States Army, sauntered forward to the bow. Private Noll

Terry, feeling, if anything a bit more forlorn, followed him.

Just as they were nearing the dock at Bedloe's Island, Noll ventured:

"I wonder how Tip Branders feels about now."

"I wonder," muttered Hal.

CHAPTER V

IN THE AWKWARD SQUAD

ONCE they were ashore our young rookies found Bedloe's Island a very much larger bit of real estate than it appears to the passerby on a steamboat.

It was, in fact, a long walk from the dock to the adjutant's office at headquarters.

"Hit up the stride, rookies," ordered Corporal Dodds. "Double-time march — hike. Don't keep the post adjutant from his luncheon."

Corporal Dodds' real reason for haste was that he had a crony in one of the squad rooms at barracks whom he wanted to see as early as possible.

Shortly the rookies and their guide entered the adjutant's office. The adjutant proved to be a captain of infantry with a corporal and two privates on duty in his office as clerks.

"Sir, I report with two recruits," announced Corporal Dodds, coming to a salute, which the adjutant returned.

"Their papers?" asked the adjutant.

"Here, sir."

"Very good, Corporal. You may go."

Turning to the chums Captain Anderson asked:

"You are Overton?"

"Yes, sir," Hal replied, doing his best to salute as neatly as Corporal Dodds had. Again the adjutant returned the salute in kind. "Then you are Terry?" he asked, turning.

"Yes, sir," Noll returned, not omitting to salute.

The adjutant called to his principal clerk.

"Corporal, make the proper entries for these men. Then take them over to Sergeant Brimmer's squad room."

With that the adjutant picked up his uniform cap and left the office, all the enlisted men present rising and standing at attention until he had closed the door after him.

The corporal made the necessary entries, then rose and picked up his own uniform cap.

"Come with me, rookies," he directed briefly.

So Hal and Noll followed, feeling within them another surge of that curiously lonely and depressed feeling.

This corporal led them into the barracks building, and down a corridor on the ground floor. He paused, at last, before a door that he flung open. Striding into the room, the corporal looked about him.

"Where is Sergeant Brimmer?" he asked.

"Not here now," replied another corporal, coming forward.

"Two rookies. Hand 'em over to Brimmer when he comes in," replied the conductor from the adjutant's office.

With that he strode out again, shutting the door after him.

The last corporal of all proved to be an older man than any of his predecessors. He appeared to be about thirty-five years old; he was tall, dark-featured and rather sullen-looking.

In this room there were twenty cot beds, arranged in two opposite rows, with their heads to the walls. On each cot the bedding had been rolled back in a peculiarly exact fashion.

At the further end of the squad room was a table and several chairs.

The occupants of the room, at this moment, were a dozen men, besides the corporal. Three of the men, like our young rookies, were still wearing the clothes in which they had enlisted. The others wore light blue uniform trousers and fatigue blouses of dark blue. Some of these men in uniform looked almost indescribably "slouchy." They were men who had received their uniforms, but who had not yet had enough of the setting-up drills to know how to wear their uniforms.

"What are you looking about you for?" de-

manded the corporal. "Wondering why dinner ain't spread on that table yonder?"

"No," replied Hal quietly. "We're just waiting to be told what to do with ourselves."

"What do I care what you do with yourselves?" demanded the corporal, turning on his heel and walking away.

So Hal and Noll remained where they were, the feeling of loneliness growing all the time.

"Don't mind Corporal Shrimp any more than you have to," advised one of the uniformed rookies, coming over to them after a few moments. "Shrimp is a terror and a grouch all the time. Sergeant Brimmer you'll find a real old soldier, and a gentleman all the time."

"Then it's just our luck to find Sergeant Brimmer out," smiled Hal.

"Here he comes now," murmured the uniformed rookie, as the door of the squad room opened.

At the first glimpse of the newcomer Hal made up his mind that he was going to like Sergeant Brimmer. He was a man of about thirty, tall, rather slender, erect, thoroughly well built, with light, almost golden hair and mustache, and a keen but kindly blue eye.

"Recruits?" he asked, as he approached the boys.

Both answered in the affirmative.

“Corporal Shrimp,” called Brimmer, “have you no report to make to me about these new men?”

“Why, yes,” answered Shrimp, coming from the further end of the room. “These men have just been brought here from the adjutant. They’re assigned to your squad room.”

“Very good, Corporal. Men, what are your names?”

Hal and Noll both answered.

“Friends?” asked Sergeant Brimmer.

“Chums,” Hal stated.

“Then you’ll be bunkies, too, of course. You want beds together, don’t you?”

“If we may have them,” Noll answered.

“Follow me, then. Here you are. Eight and nine will be your beds until further orders. Later, when you have your clothing issued, Corporal Shrimp or I will show you how and where to take care of it. Now, men, you’ll likely find it a bit dull here for a day or two. Recruits generally do. Then that will all wear off, and you’ll be glad you’re in the Army. If there’s anything you need to know, ask Corporal Shrimp”—Hal winced inwardly—“or me. The mess call will soon go for dinner. When it does, follow me outside, but take your places in the rear of A Company, which is the recruit company that you now belong to. I’ll

show you where to stand. New recruits don't march with the battalion—not until they've been drilled enough to know how to march."

"Is there a battalion here, Sergeant?"

"Two recruit companies, at present. The non-commissioned officers, of course, are trained soldiers. Then there are a few old-time privates in each company—just enough to give the recruits some steadiness. The trained privates also act as instructors sometimes."

With this remark Sergeant Brimmer moved away.

"He's all right," murmured Noll Terry. "If all were like Sergeant Brimmer we wouldn't feel so lonely and blue."

Noll had let that last word escape him without thinking. But Hal, who felt just as blue, pretended not to have heard.

"It'll all look different to us, just as soon as we get into uniform, and get past the first breaking-in," predicted young Overton.

Ta-ra-ra-ra-ta! sounded a bugle, out in the corridor.

"That must be the call to dinner," muttered Hal.

But a uniformed recruit, passing them, stopped to say, pleasantly:

"No; that's first call to mess. Every call by the bugler has a 'first call,' sounded just a little

while before. That 'first call' is always just the same strain. But the real call differs, according to what is meant. The mess call itself, which is the one you'll hear next; sounds like this."

The recruit hummed mess call for them.

"Thank you," acknowledged Hal gratefully.

"Feeling lonesome?" asked the uniformed rookie.

"J-j-just a bit," assented Hal.

"I'm getting almost over it," smiled the uniformed one. "The older men, those who have seen service with a regiment, tell me that a man soon gets to find delight in being in the Army. But that's after he has gotten away from the recruit rendezvous."

"Oh, we'll get over it before then," promised Hal. "We'll be all over it by to-morrow."

"Look out for that Shrimp," whispered the uniformed rookie.

"Does anyone ever need that warning, after seeing the corporal and hearing him talk?" laughed Hal, in an undertone.

"Don't you rookies go to take this squad-room for a vawdy-vill show," growled Corporal Shrimp, from the near distance, as he heard the three laughing. Sergeant Brimmer had just stepped outside.

Ta-ra-ta-ra-ta! sounded a bugle again in the corridor.

"A little time to ourselves now," whispered the uniformed recruit. "That's mess call."

The men in the room were quickly filing out. Outside of barracks A Company was falling in, with B Company to the left of it.

"You un-uniformed recruits take your position at the rear, without forming," ordered Sergeant Brimmer coming up. "As your company starts Corporal Shrimp will instruct you how to form at the rear of the company."

What followed was little understood by the two recruits. But presently the two first sergeants gave their commands, and marched their companies into the mess hall.

"Fall in lively, there, by twos!" growled Shrimp roughly. "Hurry up! Don't get in the way of the head of B Company!"

To give emphasis to his orders Shrimp seized Hal and Noll each by an arm and swung them into place.

Both recruits went in with flushed faces. Shrimp's treatment had been such as to make them feel uncomfortably "raw." But as the men marched to their seats at the long tables in the mess hall this feeling of humiliation left both boys.

Hal's new friend occupied a seat at their right.

"All the corporals ain't Shrimps," he whis-

pered. "We've probably got one of the meanest corporals in the Army."

"He knows how to make everyone else feel as mean as himself," Hal whispered back.

Then all hands fell to at the meal, which tasted uncommonly good. It consisted of a stew, with plenty of meat and potatoes, and other vegetables in it. There was also bread and butter. Pie and coffee followed. Then the recruit companies were marched out again and were dismissed.

"We have twenty minutes for relaxation now," laughed Hal's new friend, who had introduced himself as Private Stanley. "After that I suppose Shrimp will get you for the setting-up drills. He always has the new men in our squad room. He——"

At this moment Sergeant Brimmer stepped up to the trio as they stood in the open air chatting.

"Overton and Terry, you'll be under Corporal Shrimp's orders after the recreation period. He'll instruct you in some of the first work of the recruit. Go with him when he orders you to turn out."

"Very good, Sergeant."

No sooner had a bugle sounded than Corporal Shrimp appeared, followed by two other un-uniformed rookies walking behind him.

"You, Overton, and you, Terry, fall in by twos behind these two raw rookies," ordered Shrimp. "Try to act a bit as though you were marching, at that. Don't be too dumb! Forward!"

Conscious that they were not cutting much of a figure, Hal and Noll followed the pair ahead of them.

Shrimp led them to a bit of green some distance away from any of the larger drill grounds.

"Squad halt!" he rumbled. "Now, rookies, you'll fall in in single rank, facing the front and about four inches apart. No, no, ye idiots!" as the four rookies started confusedly to obey. "You'll wait until I give the order 'fall in.' When I do, Overton, being the tallest, will take his place at the right, Terry next him, then Strawbridge, and then Healy. Now, rookies, d'ye think ye understand? And you'll take your places about four inches apart—just enough distance to allow each man the free use of his body. Fall in!"

So confused were the poor rookies under the scowling glances of Shrimp that, in their haste to obey, they nearly upset each other.

"Ye're a bad lot," commented the corporal, eyeing them with extreme disfavor. "You don't even know how to judge the interval between each man. Now, let every man except

the man at the left rest his left hand on his hip, just below where his belt would be if he wore one. Let the right arm hang flat at the side. Now, each man move up so that his right arm just touches his neighbor's left elbow. Careful, there! Don't crowd. Now, let your left arms fall flat. There, you ostriches, you have the interval from man to man as well as rookies can get it inside of a week. Now, each one of you note his interval from the man at his right. So. Fall out!"

Without moving the rookies stood looking uncertainly at Corporal Shrimp.

"Fall out, I say!" roared the corporal.

"Do we go back to the squad room?" asked one of the rookies.

"Listen to the man, now!" growled Shrimp. "Do you go back to the squad room! You'll be lucky if ye ever live to see the squad room again. Fall out—fall out of ranks, ye idiots!"

"Oh," answered the same rookie. "Why didn't you say so?"

"Why didn't I say so?" roared Shrimp. "Why didn't I say so, indeed! Ye'll take the order the way I give it—not the way ye want it. When I tell ye to fall in, that means to get into line, with the proper interval from man to man. When I say fall out, ye're to get out of ranks again. Now, then—fall in!"

In a twinkling the recruits jumped to obey. Shrimp surveyed their alignment with a scowl. Nothing that a recruit could do would satisfy him.

“Left hand on the hips, again. Now, get the interval—get it!” roared Shrimp. “Dress up there, ye rookie idiots!”

Shrimp would have made an excellent drillmaster had he possessed the patience and the human decency of Sergeant Brimmer. But this corporal made his work doubly hard, and hindered the rookies from learning, by his persistent nagging and bad temper.

“Now, we’ll see whether ye can do as well at learning the position of the soldier,” he snapped out nastily, after a while. “Whenever, in barracks, or elsewhere, in ranks or out, if you hear the command, ‘Attention,’ ye’ll come to the position of the soldier. Now, watch me, ye thick-pated rookies, and, as I describe it, bit by bit, I’ll come to the position of the soldier.”

After lounging for an instant Corporal Shrimp continued:

“Heels on the same line, and as near together as possible. Turn your feet out equally so that they form an angle of sixty degrees.”

Then, straightening up, this irate drillmaster went on:

“Hold your knees straight, but don’t have

'em stiff. Keep your body erect on the hips, but inclined ever so little forward; keep your shoulders squared, and let 'em fall equally. Let your arms and hands hang naturally, with the backs of the hands outward and the little fingers almost touching the seams of your trousers legs. Keep your elbows near the body. Head erect and square to the front. Draw yer chin in slightly, but don't hold it as if it was glued there, and keep yer eyes straight to the front."

Corporal Shrimp illustrated excellently in his own person. But then he glared at the rookies and shouted, "Attention!"

Of course none of the rookies did it just right.

"Fall out! Overton, ye lobster, come on the carpet before me, and I'll teach ye or make ye crazy!"

"The—the carpet?" asked Hal, staring dubiously. His head was tired from the corporal's badgering, or he would have been brighter.

"On that spot!" glared Shrimp, pointing at the grass about six feet in front of him, and adding an oath that made Hal's face flush. But young Overton obeyed, nevertheless. Shrimp scolded and hounded, but Hal did his best to keep his patience and really learn. Then it was Noll's turn. Terry came in for a worse badgering than ever.

"Ye bandy-legged griddle-greaser!" snarled Shrimp, beside himself. "Is that what ye call letting yer arms hang naturally. Where did ye get yer ideas of nature, anyway, ye spindle-shanked carpenter's apprentice?"

Sergeant Brimmer had stepped within view, though behind the corporal's back, and stood looking quietly on.

"Ye wart on an Army buzzard!" howled Shrimp. "Ye——"

"That will do, Corporal," broke in Sergeant Brimmer quietly. "You're relieved, Corporal. I have time to take over the squad myself. You may go to the squad room."

Shrimp turned with a glare, but with the snarl somehow dying on his lips. He gasped with anger and humiliation, then turned about and stalked away toward barracks.

During the next hour things went along very differently. Sergeant Brimmer was an alert drillmaster, and he permitted no lagging or indifference on the part of the recruits. Neither did he hesitate to single out any rookie who did a thing improperly. But the sergeant's method of drilling was wholly manly. He was patient, even if firm, and he called no rookie uncomplimentary names.

"Fall out," ordered the sergeant presently. "Sit down if you want to, men, or walk about.

And I'll answer any questions that you may want to ask me out of ranks."

"What a difference between non-coms," uttered Hal to Noll, as the two chums stepped away a few yards. "Sergeant Brimmer is a man, first of all. I'd cheerfully drill under him until I dropped."

"Non-com" is the abbreviation used in the Army for non-commissioned officer—a corporal or sergeant.

"I hope we don't have to have much to do with Shrimp," muttered Noll Terry. "And I hope we don't find many Shrimps in the Army."

"Fall in!" sounded Sergeant Brimmer's voice, at last. How the young rookies sprang to obey, their eyes shining with interest!

Sergeant Brimmer now began to explain the "rests." Next he came to the salute. For some minutes he drilled them in the first principles of marching. But brief rests were frequent, and during these rests he answered all questions put to him.

"Fall in!" he shouted once more. The rookies fell in as eagerly as before. "Squad, attention!"

At that instant a far-off bugle sounded.

"That closes this period of instruction," announced the sergeant. "Dismissed!"

As the four broke out of ranks Hal approached their instructor respectfully.

“Sergeant, ‘dismissed’ means that we’re through, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, Overton. And this squad is dismissed until supper time. You can return to squad room, or you may remain about out-doors, if you’d rather. Don’t go far away from barracks, though.”

“Thank you,” Hal replied, and turned away with Noll.

CHAPTER VI

THE TROUBLE WITH CORPORAL SHRIMP

"I DON'T want to say or think anything disloyal," laughed Noll, as the two chums turned in at barracks, "but I wish Shrimp would desert."

"I wish we could have Sergeant Brimmer to teach us all the time," returned Hal. "I can't believe that Corporal Shrimp is any good to the service."

"I wouldn't be any good if I had to stand around for a fellow like Shrimp all the time," Noll answered. "How different it is when we are under a real soldier like the sergeant."

Corporal Shrimp was alone in the squad room when the two chums entered. The corporal was scowling sulkily until he caught sight of Hal and Noll.

"Come over to yer beds, ye two blamed rookies!" ordered Shrimp, jumping up. "I'll be bound ye know nothing yet of how to fold yer bedding."

"No, we don't," replied Hal, with an outward respect that he was far from feeling.

"Then watch me, bandy-legs, while I put yer bed down in regulation style."

Shrimp quickly threw the bedding down on Hal's cot. With the deft hands of the trained soldier Shrimp made the bed up with neatness and dispatch.

"And in the morning, after first call to reveille," continued the Corporal, "ye'll turn yer mattress up—so. And fold and lay the bedding—so. Now, let's see ye shake down yer bed and make it."

This task Hal performed rather well for the first time trying. But Shrimp found a lot of fault, volubly, then finally shoved Hal Overton aside and finished the bed-making with a few deft touches.

"Now, turn up yer mattress, and fold yer bedding," ordered the corporal.

Hal started patiently to obey, but there was no pleasing Shrimp. He vented a couple of oaths, evidently in order to make the matter clearer.

"Now, do it over again," ordered Shrimp roughly.

"This fellow is venting his spite on us because he's angry at the way Sergeant Brimmer relieved him this afternoon," thought Hal hotly. Yet he tried patiently to follow out his instructions.

In the meantime four or five other recruits had entered the squad room.

"Here ye gibbering monkey! Not that way!" snarled Shrimp. "Stand aside!"

Seizing Hal by the shoulders Shrimp deliberately hurled him out into the middle of the squad room. Hal did not fall, but he wheeled about, his eyes flashing.

Corporal Shrimp stood surveying him angrily.

"Making faces at me, are ye, ye Army-lawyer?" howled Shrimp, springing toward Hal.

He launched a blow full at the young rookie. Private Overton, who had some knowledge of boxing and of its companion foot-work, stepped aside.

But as Shrimp recovered and prepared to launch another blow, Hal Overton threw his hands up at guard.

Then recollecting that he was a private soldier, under discipline, Hal let his hands fall uselessly at his side, while a hot flush of shame mounted to his brow.

"Going to hit me, were ye?" sneered Shrimp, in an ugly tone. "It's well ye didn't ! Now, stand where ye are till I take some of the conceit out of ye!"

Shrimp raised his right fist deliberately.

"Corporal!"

There was no mistaking that crisp tone. It was one of sharp command. Sergeant Brim-

mer, who had just opened the door and looked in, now came striding down the squad room.

"Corporal, stand at attention!"

Shrimp wheeled about, coming to the position of the soldier as he faced the sergeant. But the corporal's countenance was still as black as thunder. Sergeant Brimmer, too, was thoroughly angry, though righteously so.

"Corporal Shrimp, you're in arrest for striking at and humiliating a private soldier. Come with me to the company commander."

"Now, see here, Sergeant," began Shrimp hoarsely, "you don't know what I have to put up with with these rookies. I have to do something to keep discipline among men who are new to barracks. I——"

"Hold your tongue and come with me," insisted Sergeant Brimmer crisply.

There was no disregarding that angry, authoritative tone. As the sergeant wheeled Shrimp turned and went with him, as though stricken suddenly dumb.

"Good enough!" rose a cry, as the door closed on the two non-coms.

"Got what he needs," muttered some one else.

"I hope he stays in arrest," added another rookie. "This squad room was a good deal like a madhouse when the sergeant wasn't here."

Twenty minutes went by before the door

opened to admit Sergeant Brimmer on his return.

“Now, men, come close. I want to tell you a few things,” began the sergeant. “The first is this. No non-commissioned officer has any right to swear at any of you. It is in violation of regulations. If any non-commissioned officer calls you vile names, or swears at you, it is your right, and your duty, too, to report it to the non-commissioned officer in charge of the squad room. If he fails to take heed of your complaint, then go to the first sergeant of the company. If he fails to heed your complaint, then go to the company commander. Is that clear?”

The recruits nodded.

“Second,” pursued Sergeant Brimmer, “no non-commissioned officer has any right to strike you, unless it be strictly in self-defense, or in defense of an officer who is threatened by you. You have the same remedy of complaint, if any non-commissioned officer strikes you, or lays violent hands on you, as in the case of vile or profane language. Is that clear.”

“Yes, Sergeant,” came from all sides.

“Any questions?” asked Sergeant Brimmer, looking about him.

“Has any officer any right to direct bad language at an enlisted man, or to strike him?” queried Noll.

"The officer has no more right than anyone else, except in an emergency of danger to himself or others," replied Sergeant Brimmer. "But there's this difference: I've been in the Army fourteen years, and I never knew an officer to degrade himself in that fashion. But occasionally a non-commissioned officer will so disgrace himself. Either the officer or non-commissioned officer who swears at or strikes an enlisted man may be court-martialed, and, if it is found that he is guilty, he is dismissed from the service."

"We've had an awful lot to put up with from Corporal Shrimp, Sergeant," announced one of the uniformed recruits.

"I'm afraid you have, men. But I don't want you to carry tales to me. Tale-bearing is never worth while, nor encouraged, in the Army. Corporal Shrimp's case is now before the commanding officer. To-night or to-morrow an officer will be here to take the complaints of any of you men who have grievances. You will be expected to complain to the officer only about wrongs that have been done you by Corporal Shrimp. The officer will not permit any tale-bearing about anything that happened to anyone else. Corporal Shrimp is now in another squad room, under arrest. He will probably be court-martialed. In any case he won't return

here until his case has been thoroughly disposed of."

The door opened, and a corporal of twenty-five years, or under, entered, striding straight up to Brimmer.

"Sergeant, I am directed by the company commander to report to you for quarters and duty here," announced the newcomer.

"Very good, Corporal Davis. I will assign you to your cot at once."

The new corporal was speedily assigned, after which the sergeant left the room on duty.

"Are there any new recruits here who do not fully understand the care of their bedding?" inquired Corporal Davis pleasantly.

"I do not, Corporal," Hal answered.

"Nor do I," came from Noll.

"Which are your beds, then?" asked Davis promptly.

Within fifteen minutes both Hal and Noll knew how to make beds, and how to fold them away for the day.

Davis proved to be a younger edition of the sergeant. He was not familiar with the recruits, but taught what he was there to teach, and did it with a mingling of firmness and patience.

"From policing of quarters in the morning until tattoo at night," went on Corporal Davis,

“you are not allowed to take down your bedding and make up the bed, except under orders for purposes of instruction. At tattoo you may make up your bed and turn in promptly, if you wish. At taps you must have your bed made, and get into it at once. Any man up after taps, except by permission, is subject to discipline.”

Supper call came soon after. When the evening meal was finished our young rookies found that they had the evening to themselves. They could stay in squad room, or could go out into the open, if they preferred, though, as rookies, they could not roam as they pleased over the whole post.

Hal and Noll elected to take a stroll after supper.

“Hal,” proposed Noll, “I want to ask you something.”

“Permission granted,” laughed Private Overton.

“Do you think you’re going to like the Regular Army as much as you expected?”

“Yes, siree,” replied Hal promptly, and with enthusiasm. “Shrimp was hard to swallow, and he would have made this place purgatory to us. But he was caught, red-handed, and we’ve had a lesson, the first day in the service, that real justice rules always in the Army. The

breaking-in as recruits, Noll, is going to be harder than I thought, even if we have such fine men as Brimmer and Davis all the time. But, after we get through that period, and at last know our duties and understand the life, we're going to be mighty glad that we took the oath and enlisted under the Flag."

"It's mighty good to hear you say that," replied Noll Terry almost gratefully. "But I'm afraid we have a fearful lot ahead of us to learn. It will take an awfully long time to learn all we have got to know, I fear."

"A recruit generally stays about three months at the rendezvous," Hal went on. "After that he's drafted to his regiment, sent away to join it, and then he's a real soldier at last."

"With still a lot to learn, though," added Noll.

"Yes," Hal assented. "I imagine that the real soldier always learns as long as he remains in the service."

After a long walk, doubling back and forth over some roads and paths several times, our young rookies found themselves looking at the water by the Jersey end of the island.

"I wonder if we'd be allowed to go over there by the water's edge?" suggested Hal. "It would be fine to sit down there and hear the waves lap up against the shore. I don't want

to go in yet, Noll, but I am tired enough to want to sit down."

"Here comes some one in uniform," murmured Noll.

It was a sergeant passing, though one the rookies had not seen before.

"Sergeant," called Hal, "may I ask you a question?"

"Of course," answered the sergeant, halting and regarding them.

"We're rookies; just joined to-day," continued Hal. "We were wondering if it would be any breach of discipline for us to go over there by the shore and sit down near the water for a while."

"There's no rule against it," replied the sergeant. "But I'd advise you to be back before taps, for it generally takes a recruit some time to get his bed made right."

"Thank you, Sergeant. We'll be sure to go back in time."

As the sergeant passed on Hal and Noll headed for the shore.

"Here's as good a place as any, Noll," said Hal, as they reached the shore. He pointed to a little depression in the ground. There was a little rise of ground before them as they threw themselves down flat, though it did not wholly shut off their view of the water.

Little waves lapped up monotonously against the beach.

"My, but that's a sound to make one drowsy," laughed Noll contentedly.

"We mustn't let it have that effect on us," uttered Hal, half in alarm. "I am tired, but it would never do to fall asleep here and be late at tattoo. I don't know what kind of scrape that would get us into."

"Do you know," went on Noll, "this day's doings all seem like parts of a dream to me. I can't realize, yet, that I'm a soldier. I suppose it's because we haven't our uniforms yet."

"That has something to do with it, of course," nodded Hal. "I thought this a pretty good suit of clothes when I left home, but now I feel actually shabby and fearfully awkward when I look about me at older recruits in their snappy uniform. It'll really seem like a big load off my mind, Noll, when I find myself in the blue."

"The fellows tell me that a rookie generally has his first issue of uniform in about three days," said Noll. "That won't be so very long to wait."

"Won't it, though?" almost grumbled Hal. "Any time at all is too long to wait, when we've been dreaming so long about wearing the uniform."

"Why, we'd be a discredit to the uniform.

at present," smiled Noll. "Think how awkward we looked and felt, and were to-day. It seemed as though it were going to be simply impossible to learn the first steps of a soldier's business."

"We'll learn faster, now," suggested Hal; "now that Shrimp has gone out of our lives."

"*Has* he gone out of our lives, I wonder?" mused Noll.

"Say," hinted Hal, "I'd have given a lot to have seen Tip Branders drilling under Shrimp."

"I don't suppose we'll be very likely to see Tip again, for some years," suggested Noll.

In this he was in error, as will presently appear.

"How's the time running along, I wonder?" was Noll's next thought.

Hal drew his watch from a pocket, laid it on the ground, and struck a match, screening the blaze with his hands.

"We've nearly an hour yet," Overton answered.

"I don't know but we'd better go back before we have to," ventured Noll. "Hullo, there's a boat out there, putting in this way."

Though neither of the boys knew it some of the glow of the burning match had been visible in the darkness out on the water, and this boat was coming in answer to a fancied signal.

"I'm going to watch that boat a bit," whispered Hal in his chum's ear.

"Why?"

"Well, I don't believe it has any right to land here at night. Any boatman here on honest business ought to go around to the dock, I think."

"Pooh!" breathed Noll.

"Don't make any noise, anyway."

It was very dark, but the rookies could see a small rowboat head into the beach just a little way below them. There was one man in the boat, and he promptly sounded a low, cautious whistle. It was answered from behind the young recruits, somewhere. Then the sound of steps.

Some one was approaching, and the boatman, standing up in his craft, listened, then called in a low voice:

"That you, Sim?"

"Yep."

"Good!" answered the boatman. "I got your word, 'phoned from New York. I've got cit clothes for you in the boat, also a weight to sink your uniform with, when you make the change."

Now the newcomer trod down straight past the place of concealment of the boys. Something in his figure was wholly familiar.

"Why, that's Corporal Shrimp!" called Hal, springing up and running down toward the shore. Noll followed his chum on the instant, both arriving at once.

"Well, what do you rookies want here?" demanded Shrimp, turning upon them with an oath.

"I guess we're here on duty," clicked Hal resolutely. "You're supposed to be in arrest, Corporal, and here you are leaving the post on the sly!"

"I'm out of arrest, and on duty. Stand aside!" snarled Shrimp, his look becoming very ugly.

"Is it a kind of duty that calls for you to sneak away in this fashion, put on citizen's clothes, and sink your uniform in the bay?" demanded Private Overton mockingly. "If you tell me that, Corporal, I don't believe you."

Corporal Shrimp uttered another ugly oath. Then, with a flashing movement, he drew a service revolver from under his blouse and thrust the muzzle almost in Private Overton's face.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN THE GUARD CAME

“**L**OOK out, Sim Shrimp!” called the boatman quickly, warningly.

For, while Hal had stood looking gamely at the revolver, Noll Terry had side-stepped, and now leaped at the corporal.

Whack! Noll struck up the glinting barrel of the weapon.

Private Overton, seeming to move in the same instant, leaped forward in front.

Bang! The revolver was discharged, but harmlessly into the air, as both rookies tackled the corporal and bore him to the ground.

“Help, here, Bill!” cried Shrimp, as he found himself going over backward.

The boatman leaned over to snatch up an oar. As he rose with it he saw Private Hal Overton rise with the corporal’s revolver in his hand.

“Stay where you are, Corporal, and don’t make any fuss,” advised Hal grimly. “Your friend had better stay where he is if he doesn’t want to know what it feels like to have a bullet going through him.”

“Drop that gun, and let me up! Get out of my way,” ordered Shrimp. “You’re interfer-

ing with me in the discharge of my duty, and I'll put you both in a lot of trouble."

"Don't you try to get up," ordered Noll, who had thrown himself across the corporal and was holding him down.

"Sentry!" yelled Hal. "Sentry."

He should have called, "Corporal of the guard!" but he didn't know that.

Another shot at some distance was heard, followed by a lusty shout from a sentry of:

"Corporal of the guard, post number seven!"

"Let me up out of this, and I'll let you both off," proposed Corporal Simeon Shrimp.

"You'll stay just where you are," ordered Hal, "and I give you my word that, if I see any signs of your trying to escape, I'll drill you through with all the bullets this revolver carries."

Running feet were now coming rapidly their way.

"Lemme go—boys, do," pleaded the corporal brokenly, terror ringing in his voice. "Boys, you don't know what fearful trouble you'll get me into."

"That's a different song," retorted Private Hal Overton dryly. "But it wouldn't do any good to let you go now. Your friend has shoved off, and is rowing like mad."

The steps of running men now came nearer.



Both Rookies Tackled the Corporal.

"This way, Corporal of the guard!" called Private Overton.

In another moment the corporal and two men of the guard raced to the spot.

"This is Corporal Shrimp. He was under arrest, and trying to escape," announced Hal. "There was a friend of his here with a boat, and he's out yonder now, Corporal, trying to get away."

"Load with ball cartridge, hail that boat, and fire if the man doesn't come about promptly and row in," ordered the corporal, turning to one of the members of the guard.

The soldier so directed loaded his rifle like lightning.

"Boat ahoy, turn about and come back!" shouted the soldier.

There was no answer from the water.

"Turn about and come back," repeated the soldier.

Still no answer. Then, after a third hail, the soldier raised his rifle to his shoulder, sighting as best he could in the darkness.

Bang! The rifle spat forth a jet of fire and sent a bullet whistling over the water.

"Send a couple of more shots after him," ordered the corporal.

Still no answer from out on the water. And, by this time, the boat was so far away in the

darkness that it was impossible to judge in which direction to aim.

"Cease firing. The rascal has escaped," said the corporal of the guard. "You are recruits, aren't you?" turning to Hal and Noll.

"Yes, Corporal."

"You're right about Corporal Shrimp being in arrest. Corporal, you've taken a long chance in breaking your arrest like this."

Shrimp said not a word. He was cunning enough to know that nothing he could say now would help his case any.

Suddenly one of the two members of the guard stepped forward, bringing his rifle to port.

"Halt!" he called. "Who goes there?"

"Sergeant of the guard," replied another voice out of the darkness.

"Advance, Sergeant of the guard, to be recognized."

Not only the sergeant came forward, but four other members of the guard with him.

"Corporal Shrimp, breaking arrest and attempting to desert, Sergeant," reported the corporal of the guard.

"Shrimp, what a fool you've been to-day!" muttered Sergeant Collins. "Let him up, men. Hold out your hands, Corporal Shrimp. I've got to do it."

His face sallow with dread and humiliation, Shrimp held out his hands, while the sergeant snapped a pair of handcuffs into place over his wrists.

"March the prisoner to the guard-house, Corporal," directed the sergeant of the guard. Then he turned to Private Hal, who still held the revolver.

"You two are recruits?"

"Yes, Sergeant."

"You stopped the prisoner from escaping?"

"Yes, Sergeant."

"Where did you get that revolver?"

"It is the one that Corporal Shrimp drew on us when we attempted to prevent him from escaping."

"You took it away from him in a scuffle?"

"Yes, Sergeant."

"Mighty fine work for a pair of young recruits," declared Sergeant Collins promptly.

"Your names?"

Hal and Noll informed the sergeant of the guard on this point as the sergeant turned on his way back to the guard-house.

"You'll come with me, Overton and Terry. The officer of the day will need to hear your statements."

"We'll not be censured, Sergeant, for being late at the squad room?"

"Hardly," came the dry retort. "You're now under orders from the guard. Don't worry, men."

Shrimp's voice was audible once more. He was swearing volubly over the trick that fate had played him.

"Stop that prisoner's swearing," ordered Sergeant Collins sharply.

In a short time the guard party reached the post guard-house.

Lieutenant Mayberry, officer of the day, stood just outside of the door.

"What have you there, Corporal?" asked Lieutenant Mayberry curiously.

"Corporal Shrimp, sir, for breaking arrest and attempting to desert, sir," replied the corporal of the guard, bringing his hand to his piece in a rifle salute, which the officer of the day acknowledge by bringing his right hand up to the visor of his cap.

"Where did you catch him?"

"At the shore, sir, over there," replied the corporal of the guard, pointing.

"There's no sentry post over there, Corporal."

"No, sir; the prisoner was caught by two trook—recruits, sir."

"Two recruits?"

"Yes, sir."

“Where are they?”

“Coming, sir, with the sergeant of the guard.”

At this moment Sergeant Collins stepped forward into the light.

“These are the two recruits, sir, who caught the prisoner,” announced Sergeant Collins, making the rifle salute.

“Your names and company, men?” asked Lieutenant Mayberry.

“Private Overton, A Company, sir,” replied Hal, saluting.

“Private Terry, A Company, sir,” from Noll.

“How long have you men been on post?” asked the officer of the guard.

“Since about noon, to-day, sir.” Hal was spokesman this time.

“And you’ve already started your Army career by catching a man in the act of desertion?” cried the lieutenant. “Men, you’re beginning well. Corporal, lock the prisoner in a cell. Then report to me at my desk. Sergeant, bring Privates Overton and Terry inside with you.”

Hal and Noll, the sergeant and the corporal soon stood grouped before the desk of the officer of the day. Sergeant Collins had turned over the revolver that Private Hal had taken from Shrimp.

Lieutenant Mayberry listened with very evident interest as the story of the capture was unfolded to him.

"Corporal, did you see the boat in question?" asked the officer of the day, at last.

"Yes, sir, though very indistinctly, in the distance. It was out of sight in the darkness, an instant after, sir."

"But there can be no doubt that the boat was there, Corporal?"

"I am absolutely certain of it, sir," replied the corporal.

"That is all, now," finished Lieutenant Mayberry. "Overton and Terry, I am going to commend you, in an off-hand way, now, for your judgment and intelligence to-night. You have made an excellent beginning. You may very likely hear from the commanding officer later."

At that moment a bugle call was heard.

"That's taps, isn't it?" asked Hal, realizing for the first time how time had passed at the guard-house.

"Yes," replied Sergeant Collins. "Tattoo went some time ago."

"You won't find yourselves in any trouble, men," broke in Lieutenant Mayberry, with a slight smile. "Report to the non-commissioned officer in charge of your squad room that you have been at the guard-house under orders."

As soon as dismissed Hal and Noll made a swift spurt for barracks."

"Too bad, the first night, men," said Sergeant Brimmer quietly, meeting them just inside the door of the squad room.

Hal promptly accounted for both himself and his chum.

"Whew!" whistled the startled sergeant softly. "You caught Corporal Shrimp in the act of deserting? Men, your time to get square came around soon, didn't it?"

"We didn't do it to get square, Sergeant," replied Hal. "We did it as a matter of military duty."

"Well, go softly to your beds, men. I'll go with you, to see that you make 'em up according to rule."

As Sergeant Brimmer went back to his own iron cot he muttered to himself:

"Caught Shrimp, and turned him over to the guard! Those lads are going to make good soldiers. And it won't pay any comrade to make enemies of them needlessly."

CHAPTER VIII

THE CALL TO COMPANY FORMATION

UNIFORMED rookies at last!

How proud each of our young rookies felt when at last he had a chance to survey himself in a glass.

Never, it seemed, had uniforms fitted quite as neatly before.

Never, at all events, had young recruits felt any keener delight than did Hal and Noll when they found themselves in their first infantry uniforms.

From that happy instant they were looked upon as the two brightest, keenest recruits on post.

On the first day of their uniformed lives Sergeant Brimmer came to them.

"You are directed to fall in at parade, this afternoon, without arms. At formation I will place you in the rear rank."

Though they had their uniforms, their rifles had not yet been issued.

"What does it all mean?" wondered Noll. "We're not promoted to the company yet. We're not out of the squad work yet."

"We can wait to find out what it means," Hal

answered. "It won't be many hours till parade time, now."

Then, at the bugle call, these young soldiers hurried outside, where Corporal Davis formed them and marched them away.

Having finished with the "school of the soldier" our two rookies were now in the "school of the squad."

In a company of infantry the squad consists of seven privates and a corporal. Marching in column of twos, or in column of fours, the corporal's place is on the left of the front rank of the squad; he himself makes the eighth man. But, for purposes of instructing recruits, the squad consists of eight rookies and a corporal.

Davis now led them away to the field, where he halted them.

"We will first," he announced, "take up the six setting-up drills of the manual, and go through with them three or four times. You men will do it as snappily as possible to-day."

These exercises consist of various gymnastic movements with the arms, of bending until the hands touch the ground, and of leg-raising work. The setting-up drills are very similar to ordinary work without apparatus in a gymnasium—but with this difference: the rookie is made to go through with them more and more snappily each time that he is set to the work.

The result is that, within a few weeks, an awkward and perhaps shuffling, shambling young man is trained and built into the erect, alert, snappy and dignified soldier.

The setting-up work performed, Corporal Davis next drilled the rookies in alignments, interval-taking, marchings, turnings and "about," which corresponds to the old-time "about-face." It might be well to remark that all military commands in these days, have been greatly simplified as compared with the old style of doing things.

Davis was an alert and industrious instructor, yet he abused none of the men, nor ever lost his patience. He was making rapid progress with this squad.

"Fall out," he called, from time to time.

"To-morrow you will have your arms issued to you," he announced during one of the rests. "Then you will learn the manual of arms, and also how to march with arms. Your work will be harder, but you're being prepared for harder work now."

By this time Hal and Noll had been in the Army nearly three weeks. Some of the rookies in the same squad had been in the service considerably longer. The length of time that he remains a recruit depends very much upon the rookie himself.

“Our arms?” said Noll to his chum. “That’s the last step toward being a real soldier.”

“No; the last step is when your company commander pronounces you a qualified private soldier,” rejoined Hal Overton. “And that’s after you’ve been drafted into a real regiment, at that.”

The loneliness had all vanished now. Both Hal and Noll were now wholly in love with the life, and anxious for the day when they should be sent forth to their regiment. They had requested that they be sent to the same regiment, and had little doubt but that their wish would be granted.

No longer did the arduous work make them tired. Instead, the steady, brisk and systematic exercise left them keen and very much alive when the command “dismissed” came.

At last a bugle sounded the recall for the rookie squads. Corporal Davis finished the instruction in which he was engaged, then called out:

“Halt! Dismissed.”

In an instant the rookies left the ranks, glad of a bit of play-time before supper.

But Davis called after two of them:

“Overton and Terry, don’t forget that you’re under orders to report at company formation before parade this afternoon.”

"We won't forget it, Corporal," Hal answered.

"Why are you ordered to company formation?" asked one of the men of the squad curiously.

"We haven't the least idea," Hal answered frankly.

"Oh, well, I can be near enough to find out," rejoined the curious one.

"Say," suggested Noll almost excitedly, "it can't be that we're considered far enough advanced to turn out with the company?"

"Hardly likely," murmured Hal, "when we don't know the manual of arms yet."

"Then what——"

"Wait."

Yet Hal Overton was certainly decidedly curious, despite his coolness. Both our young rookies hung about until they heard first call for parade. Then they hurried toward the company parade ground.

Soon the fall-in order was given, and the older rookies fell in under arms. Sergeant Brimmer, true to his word, stepped up and placed Hal and Noll six paces to the rear of the second platoon.

"Obey all orders that do not call for the manual of arms," was his parting instruction. Then Brimmer went to his own position.

The company was assembled, roll-call fol-

lowed and there was a brief inspection of arms. While this was going on the post adjutant appeared and took up post.

"Publish the orders," commanded the captain, at last.

From the breast of his blouse the adjutant drew forth an official paper. While the men in ranks stood at order arms, the adjutant read aloud:

"For exceptional zeal, intelligence and loyalty in preventing the escape and attempted desertion of a prisoner, Recruit Privates Overton and Terry are hereby commended.' "

This was signed by the post commander.

Now Sergeant Brimmer stepped over to Hal and Noll with military stride, saying briskly:

"Recruit Privates Overton and Terry dismissed.

That was all. Brimmer was already on his way back to his own post.

"Was that all we turned out for with the company?" asked Noll in a low voice.

"Wasn't it enough?" retorted Hal in an equally low tone, as they watched the manoeuvres of the company at a distance.

"There's one thing we didn't get commended for in that order," Noll went on.

"What was that?"

"Well, we had to tackle an armed man when

we went up against the Shrimp. The order didn't say anything about courage."

"That's because only exceptional courage is ever mentioned in orders," Hal explained. "Any soldier is expected to have courage enough to face firearms."

When Sergeant Brimmer returned to squad room after parade he came straight over to Hal and Noll.

"That was a pretty good thing for you this afternoon, men," he commented pleasantly. "It isn't often that a rookie gets commended in orders."

"Does it bring any more pay?" laughed Noll.

"No; but, my man, it goes on your record, and that's worth something. The commendation that was read out in orders this afternoon goes forward to your new colonel, when you're drafted to a line regiment, and that commendation becomes a part of your permanent record in the Army. Isn't that enough?"

"It's too much," Hal declared, "for such a little thing as we did."

"You men want promotion, don't you?" asked Sergeant Brimmer.

"Surely," nodded Noll.

"When you get to your regiment, and your company commander has occasion to appoint a new corporal, he looks over the records of the

men in his company. Men, I guess you've each of you got your first grip on one of the chevrons that Shrimp dropped."

For Shrimp had been tried by court-martial, three days before. The findings, verdict and sentence had been sent on through the military channels, and would not be published until approved by the department commander. But no one at the island doubted that Shrimp would lose his corporal's chevrons, would be dismissed the service and sentenced to imprisonment in addition.

"I'd rather get chevrons, if they're coming my way, by some other means than pulling them off another man's sleeves," thought Hal to himself.

CHAPTER IX

ORDERED TO THE THIRTY-FOURTH

TWELVE working days with arms, and Privates Overton and Terry were moved on into A Company.

They were now deeper than ever in the work of learning the soldier's trade.

A tremendous change had been worked in them. Though their faces were as youthful as ever, the boys seemed to have grown into the dignity of men—of trained men, at that.

They carried themselves like soldiers, thought of themselves as soldiers, and were soldiers. For they loved their work better than ever.

“We need only to get to our regiment now, to be wholly happy,” Noll declared to his chum. “Oh, why can't more young fellows, droning their lives out in offices, or tending senseless machines in shops, understand the joy of this free, manly life?”

Of course, not all rookies at the post had conceived as large an idea of Army life.

Two, who had joined at about the same time as Overton and Terry, had not proved themselves wholly suited to a life of discipline. This pair had committed several breaches of the

rules, and had at last been haled before courts-martial and dismissed the service.

Only the young man who has in him the makings of a man and a soldier finds the life of the Army attractive. The incompetent, the shiftless and the vicious are no better off in the Army than they would be anywhere else. In fact they are out of their element.

Shrimp, the sullen, had gone, too, at last. The order had been published that sent him to undergo a year's imprisonment for having attempted to desert.

This corporal had had in him three quarters of the makings of a good soldier. He had been promoted once, and fell short of being a soldier only as he fell short of being a man.

Ahead of any that had joined at about the same time, Hal and Noll were "warned" for guard-duty. Sergeant Brimmer gave them the order, and seemed happy in doing it.

"You men are doing your work splendidly," he added briefly. "Read up the manual of guard-duty for all you're worth before guard-mount to-morrow morning."

"I think we know it by heart, already, Sergeant," Hal answered.

"I don't doubt that in the least. But it can't do you any harm to read up some more."

"Thank you, Sergeant; we'll do it."

Guard-mounting is a ceremony of importance in the Army. It is done to music, where music is available. Every man who turns out on the new guard—which means that he is to be on duty for the next twenty-four hours—is expected to present himself with his person, uniform and equipments absolutely clean and tidy. The two men who thus make the most soldierly appearance are detailed as orderlies at headquarters. These orderlies do not have to walk post as sentries, and have in all ways a much easier time than the other members of the guard. There is always keen rivalry for the position of orderly.

On this morning, after the formation of the guard, and inspection, the post adjutant stepped forward.

“Privates Denton and Burke will fall out and report as orderlies,” he commanded.

Denton and Burke obeyed, striving hard to suppress their exultation.

“Orderly detail would have fallen to Privates Overton and Terry, who present the most soldierly appearance,” continued the adjutant, in his official tone. “But this is the first tour of guard duty for Privates Overton and Terry, and it is considered essential that they first of all learn to walk post and become familiar with the duties of sentries.”

At that the glee in the faces of Privates Denton and Burke faded somewhat. Hal and Noll tried to keep their own faces expressionless.

Hal Overton never forgot his feelings when he shouldered his rifle, with bayonet fixed, and patrolled his first sentry post for two hours.

He felt even more the sense of responsibility when he came to his first night tour of sentry duty.

In his way the sentry is a tremendously important personage. On his post he represents the whole sovereignty of the United States of America. The youngest sentry in the Army may halt and detain any officer, no matter of how exalted rank, until he is certain that the man halted is an officer entitled to pass. Of course, with a sentry of common sense the mere appearance of the uniform is enough under ordinary circumstances. But no personage in the United States may attempt to go by a sentry without the sentry's permission.

"How'd you enjoy it, Overton?" asked Sergeant Brimmer, who was sergeant of the guard, when Hal came in from his tour of night duty.

"I hope I didn't get myself into trouble," Hal answered.

"How so, lad?"

"I halted the commanding officer of the post."

“Was he in uniform?”

“No; in civilian dress. He had been to the city, I guess, and was coming up from the shore. It was dark, and I saw only the civilian clothes. So I challenged him.”

“What did the K. O. say?”

“K. O.” is the Army abbreviation for “commanding officer.”

“He asked me what I was trying to do?” smiled Hal. “So I repeated my question, ‘who’s there.’ Then he answered, ‘the commanding officer.’ I replied: ‘Advance, commanding officer, to be recognized.’ He seemed uncertain about it, but I made him step right up to me. When I saw who it was I told him to proceed.”

“Did you hold your gun at port all the time?” inquired Sergeant Brimmer.

“Yes; until I recognized the commanding officer. Then I came to present arms, and he returned my salute, then walked by.”

“Your skirts are clear enough, then,” nodded the sergeant of the guard.

“But why did he ask me, so crossly, what I was trying to do?” asked Hal.

“Why,” mused the sergeant, “my own idea of it is that K. O. was trying you out on purpose. And I’ll wager the K. O. was glad to find a rook sentry so thoroughly alive to his job.

Though I doubt if you'll get commended in orders for just being awake. But that reminds me of something that happened to me, in the Philippines," laughed Brimmer. "I was sergeant of the guard out there, and one night the colonel of another regiment tried to go by our guard. At that time the law was that no civilian could be on the streets after half-past eight. 'Twas called the curfew law there.

"Well, Colonel Blank came up in a carriage at about ten in the evening. He wasn't in uniform, mind you, lad. Well, the sentry on number one post, who didn't know the colonel, stopped his carriage, of course.

"‘I'm Colonel Blank,’ says the man in the carriage. ‘Corporal of the guard,’ calls the sentry. ‘I'm Colonel Blank,’ says the man in the carriage to the corporal of the guard. Now, the corporal didn't know the colonel either. So the corporal bawls, ‘Sergeant of the guard.’ That was I, that night, and I didn't know the colonel, either. So I asked: ‘Beg your pardon, sir, but do you know any of the officers of this command?’

"‘Name the officers,’ says the man in the carriage. So I named them.

"‘I don't know one of your officers,’ says the man in the carriage.

"‘Then I'm sorry, sir,’ says I, ‘but I'll have

to ask you, sir, to step into our guard-house until some officer of your regiment comes over in uniform and identifies you.'

"At that the man in the carriage puts on an awful scowl, draws himself up very stiff, and answers, 'I'll do nothing of the sort, Sergeant.'

" 'I beg your pardon, sir,' says I, 'but if you are Colonel Blank, then you know very well, sir, that you'll have to step inside the guard-house and wait.' "

Sergeant Brimmer chuckled heartily over the recollection.

"And did Colonel Blank obey you, and go inside and wait?" asked Hal.

"Did he?" asked Brimmer, looking surprised. "Of course he did. What's a guard for in the Army, if it can't enforce its orders? And it was past midnight when we finally got an officer, by telephone, to come over and go bail for his colonel's identity. Then, of course, we turned the colonel loose."

"Did he complain against you?" queried Private Hal.

"Who? Colonel Blank? He's too good a soldier," laughed Sergeant Brimmer. "And he's General Blank, now. Before he left, the colonel complimented me on my fitness for guard duty."

"A sentry, or a corporal or sergeant of the

guard is a pretty big soldier, isn't he?" smiled Hal.

"In some ways," nodded the sergeant, "he's a bigger man than the President. The President is only the head of the nation, while the sentry on post is the whole nation itself!"

Noll had the last two hours before daylight on post that night, but nothing happened to him except the arrival of the corporal with the relief just as dawn was breaking.

The days and the weeks sped by rapidly now. There were always new duties to be learned, but our young rookies had now picked up the habit of learning so easily and quickly that everything seemed a matter of course.

"How do you like Army life now, Noll?" Hal asked one day.

"I wouldn't swap this life for any other," exclaimed Private Noll Terry, his eyes shining. "Hal, have you never suspected that they're making men out of us here? We're learning to obey without asking why, and we're being trained in a way that will fit us to lead other men one of these days. And look how strong all the gymnastics with a rifle is making us. We sleep as we never slept before, and it takes a heap to make us tired."

"We're eating everything in sight, if that's a sign of good physical condition," laughed Hal.

"But I wish I could hear the orders sending us to our regiment," sighed Noll.

"Don't be downspirited," urged Hal, smiling cheerfully. "Our stay here at the rendezvous can't last much longer, anyway."

"How long have we been here, anyway?" Noll wondered.

"Why, we came here early in April and it's now past the middle of June," Hal went on. "Let me think. Why, it's just ten weeks to a day since we took the oath to serve the Flag."

"And a rook generally puts in three months here——" Noll began, when a soldier, close to the door of the squad room, called out:

"Attention!"

Instantly every man in the room rose and wheeled about, standing at the position of the soldier. An officer, followed by the first sergeant of A Company, was entering the room.

As the officer came to a halt the first sergeant called:

"Overton and Terry, step forward."

Hal and Noll approached the officer and the sergeant, then again stood at attention. The officer was the post adjutant, and now he spoke:

"Overton and Terry, your company commander is satisfied that you are now sufficiently instructed to go to your regiment. We have a draft for two men for the first battalion of the

Thirty-fourth Infantry, stationed at Fort Clowdry, in the Colorado mountains. If you have any objections to that regiment, or station, I will listen to them.”

“Colorado will very exactly suit me, sir, thank you,” Hal replied, his pleasure showing in his face.

“And me also, sir,” added Noll.

“Very good, then. You will both report to Sergeant Brimmer, on his return, that you are released from further duty here. You will report at my office at half-past two this afternoon for your instructions. That is all. Sergeant, follow me to the next squad room.”

The instant that the door closed Hal and Noll began to execute a swift little dance of joy, while the other rookies looked on in grinning congratulation.

“What sort of regiment is the Thirty-fourth, Sergeant?” asked Hal, after he and Noll had reported to Sergeant Brimmer.

“Just like any other infantry regiment,” replied Sergeant Brimmer. “They’re all alike. The only difference is in the station, and the station of each infantry command is usually changed every two or three years. For that matter, though you join in the Rockies, your regiment, two months later, may be ordered to the Philippines.”

That afternoon Hal and Noll reported at the post adjutant's office. Here they were provided with their railway tickets through to their new station, and were handed each a sum of money in place of rations. In addition they were granted four days' furlough before starting, this furlough to be spent at their homes. Then, each carrying his canvas case containing his surplus outfit, the young recruits started down to the dock to take the three-thirty boat to New York City.

What a glorious furlough it was, while it lasted! All their old schoolmates in the home town, and all the smaller youngsters, listened to the tales Hal and Noll told of the Army. Two or three dozen youngsters then and there formed their resolutions to enlist in the Army as soon as they were old enough.

Tip Branders had left town. Where Tip had gone was not known—but Uncle Sam's two young recruits were destined to find out later on.

CHAPTER X

A SWIFT CALL TO DUTY

“**S**EE that man in the black derby and the brown suit, coming this way, Noll? The one with the iron-gray hair?”

“Of course,” replied Noll.

“Salute him, if we get close enough.”

“Why?”

“He’s an officer.”

“Maybe,” half-assented Noll, eyeing the man with iron-gray hair.

“There isn’t much doubt about it,” retorted Hal. “He boarded the train at Kansas City. It’s summer, but he’s going somewhere up in the hills, for he had an overcoat over one arm when he boarded the train, and that overcoat was an officer’s coat. He’s in the service, and he isn’t any junior officer, either, judging by the color of his hair.”

“But——”

“Sh! Be ready with your salute.”

The two young recruits, their uniforms looking spick and span, despite their long journey by train, now brought their right hands smartly up to their cap visors as the man with iron-gray hair stepped close.

He gave Hal and Noll a prompt, smart acknowledgment of their salute, then suddenly paused, glanced at them, and asked:

"My men, how did you know me to be an officer?"

"I observed your overcoat, sir, when you boarded the train at Kansas City," Hal answered.

"You judged rightly, men," replied the officer, with a smile. "I am Major Davis, Seventeenth Cavalry. And you, as I see by your caps, belong to the Thirty-fourth Infantry."

"Yes, sir," Hal answered. "We are joining the first battalion at Fort Clowdry."

"Recruits?"

"Yes, sir."

"I wish you a pleasant life in the Army, men."

"Thank you, sir; we feel certain of finding it," Hal replied.

Both young soldiers saluted, again, as the major turned to resume his walk.

The train had stopped at Pueblo, Colorado, in the middle of the afternoon. It would be but half an hour's delay. Noll had been eager to step out away from the railway station and see as much of Pueblo as was possible. Hal had negatived this idea, through fear that they might be left behind.

"And we've not an hour to spare, you know, Noll. This is the last train for us to take if we're to report in season. So we'd better stay close to the conductor."

During the forenoon the train had rolled across the mesa or tableland below Pueblo. Hal and Noll, seated in one of the two day coaches of the train, had studied the mesa with longing eyes. Here they caught occasional glimpses of cowboys on ponies, for this mesa is still a favorite cattle region.

At this height of some five thousand feet above sea level even the late June day was not really hot. It was a glorious country on which the young recruits feasted their eyes.

"Where do we eat next?" asked Noll, of a trainman standing by.

"Any time and place you like, if you've got the chow with you," replied the trainman.

"What is the next eating station at which the train stops?" Noll insisted.

"Salida. We ought to stop there about nine o'clock to-night."

"Good eating place?"

"Great."

"It's a long time to wait," complained Noll, whom the mountain air was making furiously hungry. "Come along, Hal. We'll lay in a few sandwiches as a safety-valve."

"I hope they're not as bad as some we've bought along the way," Hal laughed, as they started toward the railroad restaurant. "Do you remember the sandwich we bought at Chicago that had the stamp on the under side, 'U. S. Army, 1863?' "

"No, and neither do you," grinned Noll.

"Fact," insisted Hal. "I found the stamp on the sandwich, and threw it out of the car. I'm sorry, now; I wish I had saved that sandwich for a curiosity. Father would have been proud of it."

Noll with a bag of sandwiches, Hal with a box of fruit, the two recruits turned toward the train again.

They were soon under way. After leaving Pueblo they forgot all about eating, for some time, for the train now bore them through some of the most picturesque parts of the lower Rocky Mountains. Both rookies spent their time on one of the car platforms, hanging far out at either side to get better views, as well as glimpses down steep cliffs into gullies below.

"Say, it's going to be dark, soon," remarked Noll, looking toward the western sky. "Why on earth didn't we get a train that would do the whole trip between Pueblo and Salida in daylight?"

"Because we didn't know the route well

enough," sighed Hal. "However, we may think we've had plenty of Rocky Mountains before our regiment's station is changed."

Half an hour later both went back to their seat in the car. Black night had come on and shut out all further possibility of viewing the wonderful country through which the train was passing.

"We can eat, anyway," sighed Noll.

For the next fifteen minutes they regaled themselves, though they were careful not to eat enough to spoil their appetite for a good hot supper at Salida.

Then, as peering out of the window revealed nothing, Noll settled back in the seat.

"If I go to sleep, be sure to wake me at Salida," he begged. "What time is the train due at Fort Clowdry?"

"Two o'clock in the morning," Hal answered.

"That's a beastly time to have to be awake," growled Noll, and began to slumber.

Not for long, however. On a steep up-grade the train was barely crawling along.

Suddenly it stopped, and with a considerable jolt, too.

Bang, bang, bang! The whistle of bullets was heard alongside the train, wherever windows were open.

"What's that?" demanded Noll, jumping up.

But Hal was in the aisle before him. Both hastened to the rear door.

"Here, laddy-bucks," called a brakeman grimly, "stay inside! It's healthier!"

"What's up?" demanded Hal, without pausing.

"Judging by the sound, the train is held up, laddy-buck. It's a bad business going outside if that's the case."

But at this instant the door was opened before Hal's face. Major Davis bounded into the car.

"Come with me, men," he called sharply. "You're not armed, are you?"

"No, sir."

Even at that exciting moment Hal did not forget his salute.

"Then keep behind me," ordered the major, drawing his revolver. "This is a mail train, and, as a United States officer, I can't allow an attempt to rob it pass without an attempt at a protest."

CHAPTER XI

GUARDING THE MAIL TRAIN

MAJOR DAVIS backed quickly out of the car, holding his weapon behind his back as he dropped to the ground beside the car.

He did not look to see whether the rookies were behind him, but they were.

Ahead, and about them, all was black, save for the light that came through the car windows.

In a twinkling, out of the fringe of darkness, almost beside the recruits, stepped a masked man.

“Back, all three of you. Back into the car!” called the masked man sharply.

Major Davis wheeled like a flash, bringing his revolver to bear. But he could not use it. A sudden move of the recruits prevented.

“Noll!” called Hal sharply, and threw himself to the ground before the masked ruffian.

Like a flash Hal wrapped his arms around the knees of the masked robber. In almost the same instant Hal struggled to his feet, carrying the unknown’s legs up with him.

Of course the ruffian toppled over backward. But Noll, who had darted to his chum’s aid,

hurled himself upon the fellow, striking him hard three times between the eyes.

The masked man's revolver was discharged as he toppled over backward, but the bullet sped harmlessly off into the night.

In another second Hal had the fellow's revolver.

"Fix him, Noll!" called Private Overton, darting forward to the officer's side.

"I have, already," muttered Noll. But he bent for an instant over the unconscious ruffian's body, then darted forward.

"Here's his box of cartridges, Hal," panted Noll.

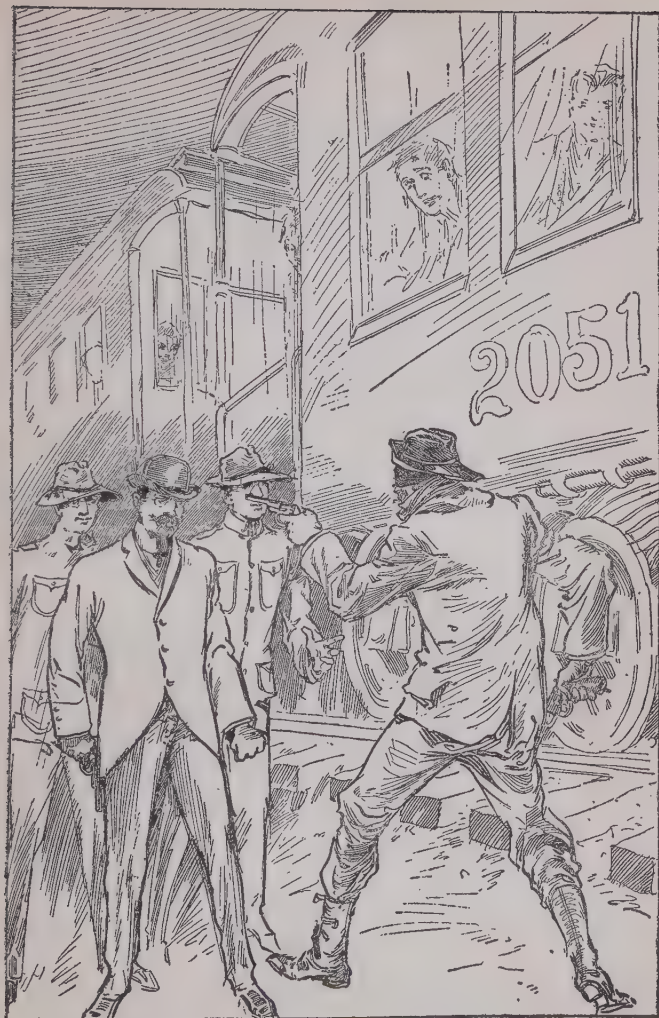
All this had seemed to occupy but a few seconds.

"Splendidly done!" glowed Major Davis. "Now come forward, and support me."

At the moment of the discharge of the pistol the uncoupled engine started forward, away from the train, with a hissing of steam. This noise must have drowned out the noise of the single shot from the train robbers up forward.

Suddenly Major Davis shot out his left arm, and Hal, bumping against it, halted beside the officer.

"There are two of the men, standing by the mail car," whispered the major. "Raise your revolver. Ready! Fire!"



“Back, All Three of You!”

Both the major's revolver and Hal's spat out jets of flame. Both poured their shots in rapidly at the two men whom they could just make out in the darkness ahead.

Then Hal had a sudden, new sensation, not by any means agreeable.

The two men, neither hit so far, turned and raised their own weapons. It seemed like two bright cascades of flame just ahead, as the ruffians fired, kneeling.

Bullets whistled close to the major and the two recruits on either side.

Then, just as suddenly, one of the ruffians toppled over; it was impossible to tell whether Major Davis or Hal Overton had scored the hit.

Thereupon, the other man, lowering his weapon, leaped for the steps of the mail car and vanished.

Major Davis ran forward, followed by both recruits. Noll was intent on getting a revolver for himself.

But Davis, more accustomed to the ways of fighting men, suddenly crouched low, peering under the body of the car just behind the mail coach.

Almost immediately the major began to fire again, in answer to shots that came from underneath the car.

But Noll waited for nothing. His sole thought was to possess a weapon. He halted over the fallen one, snatched an empty revolver from his side, then saw that the man was wounded in the right breast.

"You must have some cartridges," muttered Noll, rummaging in the fellow's clothes.

He found the box just in time.

"Lie down, you two!" called Major Davis sharply to Hal and Noll. "You'll be fired on from ahead."

Hal threw himself flat, and none too soon, for now a gust of bullets swept down from the head of the train.

As coolly as he could Hal Overton reloaded. Noll, also lying flat on the ground, was similarly engaged.

Hal was ready to fire first. There was need of it, too, for he could dimly make out two men, near the extreme head of the train, who were firing rapidly and firing their weapons in a fashion that drove up spurts of dirt all about the recruits.

For a few seconds the fight seemed as serious to those engaged in it as battle on a larger scale could have been.

Major Davis now made the first direct move. He crawled swiftly under the car, putting himself on the same side with the man he was after.

There was more shooting on the other side of the train; then, suddenly it stopped.

The two ahead, who were engaging Hal and Noll, dodged off to the side of the track into the darkness. Now, all firing stopped, for all weapons were empty.

"I hope that other scoundrel didn't get the major!" throbbed Hal anxiously.

Yet he couldn't go to see. He had his own work on this side of the train.

"Where are our pair?" whispered Noll, creeping closer.

"I don't know," Hal answered, also in a whisper. "But crawl off a little way. Bunching together gives 'em a better mark to hit."

Lying flat on the ground, both recruits played the waiting game.

Had the pair ahead stolen off altogether in the darkness?

"I'll wait a few moments," Hal decided. "Then, if I don't hear from the scoundrels, I'll cross over to see what has happened to Major Davis."

Crack! crack! crack! The vanished pair of train robbers were opening fire again, from behind a boulder that sheltered them admirably. Hal and Noll had no protection other than they could get from lying close to the ground. But they answered the fire briskly.

Crack! crack! crack! As fast as revolvers were emptied the marksmen reloaded and again began firing. In daylight the execution would have been swifter, but all hits made in black darkness are made by the grace of luck.

In the first place the only target anyone in the combat had was the flash of an opponent's pistol.

The train robbers behind the ledge changed their positions after nearly every shot. And Hal and Noll, after the warm, uncomfortable experience of having bullets fan their faces persistently, found it advisable to crouch low and dart here and there, firing from new positions.

All this time the scores of people on the train were sitting in terrified silence. Passengers or train crews rarely interfere in a case of this kind.

Not even the train's lights aided either side, for the two young recruits had taken pains to close in on the ledge sufficiently to escape illumination by the train's lights.

Crack! crack! crack! This was a new note, coming from past the forward end of the ledge.

Almost in the same instant a howl sounded from behind the barrier of rock.

Then another voice was heard, shouting.

"Hold on! We surrender! Stop the shooting!"

Instantly this hail was answered by another. It sounded good to the young recruits as Major Davis roared from behind the forward end of the ledge:

“Then throw up your hands, keep them up, and walk into the train light where we can see you.”

“You won’t shoot?” demanded the voice of the surrendering one.

“Not unless you attempt tricks,” replied the voice of Major Davis.

“All right. Here I come.”

A lone figure rose over the edge of the ledge, and a tall, masked man, holding his hands very high, strode toward the train, passing between Hal and Noll, who instantly turned and covered him with their weapons.

“Where’s the other man?” demanded Major Davis, still invisible in the blackness beyond.

“You’ll find him behind the ledge,” returned the surrendered one. “He’s hurt too bad to move.”

“Overton,” called the major, “keep your weapon trained right on that prisoner. Terry, join me behind the ledge.”

“Yes, sir,” answered both recruits.

Noll was quickly with the major on the further side of the ledge. Here they speedily found a masked man, short and rather thick-set, who had

the appearance of being unconscious. He was breathing with great effort, a deep crimson spot appearing on his right breast.

"May I ask, sir, about the man you went under the train to get?" queried Noll.

"He's dead, my man," replied Major Davis very quietly.

"Shall I try to lift this man, sir?"

"No; take his revolver, and search him for other weapons, as far as you can do so without disturbing the fellow and putting him in more pain. We'll let that hiding train crew move the casualties to the baggage car."

So Noll completed his search, while the conductor, baggage-master and some of the brakemen, noting that the firing had stopped, ventured forth.

"You trainmen take care of the dead and wounded," directed Major Davis crisply. "Terry, rejoin your comrade. I shall have to trouble you two men to stand guard over the prisoners in the baggage car until we reach Salida."

Both recruits saluted. Noll returned to the track in time to find that the first man whom he and Hal had bowled over was just coming back to his senses.

CHAPTER XII

THE ROOKIES REACH FORT CLOWDRY

ONCE more the train was under way. The engineer had taken his uncoupled engine some distance up the track, but had returned when sent for, and now the train, twenty additional minutes late, was crawling up the steep grade.

The wounded men lay on the floor of the car, receiving the attentions of a physician who had been found among the passengers.

The unwounded ones stood in a corner at the forward end of the car, Private Hal Overton, revolver in hand, watching the men closely.

Noll, a revolver in either hand, stood a little past the middle of the car, looking wholly businesslike.

Major Davis, having gone back to make sure that his own belongings were safe, now returned to the baggage car.

"Fellow," he asked of the tall prisoner, "what on earth made you stop this train?"

"Hard up," replied the man sullenly. "And a friend told us that the last time he held up a mail train, he and his pal found twelve thousand dollars in the registered mail pouches."

"You'll find at least twelve years in the mail pouches this trip," retorted Major Davis grimly.

Half an hour later a stop was made at a little tank station, to enable Major Davis to wire ahead to Salida for officers to be in readiness when they arrived.

Then the train crawled on again through the inky darkness. Noll relieved Hal, presently, though there seemed little need of alertness. The two prisoners capable of fighting looked pretty well cowed. Down at the rear end of the car, covered with a rubber blanket, lay the rigid remains of the man killed by the major.

Something more than an hour late the train pulled in at Salida. There was a crowd on hand, including four sheriff's officers. These latter came to the baggage car just before the train stopped.

"Will you take full responsibility for the prisoners now?" asked Major Davis of one officer who led the rest and who displayed his badge.

"Yes, sir," replied the deputy sheriff.

"Then I'll go and have something to eat," smiled the major dryly. "My men, do you eat here, too?"

"Yes, sir," Hal answered, saluting.

It was not an invitation to join their officer. Both recruits fully understood that. The gulf

of discipline prevents officers and men eating together.

On the platform before the station-building Major Davis halted long enough to say:

"My men, I appreciate your help to-night. It would have been too much for me alone. You men stood by me like soldiers. As a United States Army officer I would have felt disgraced had I allowed a United States mail car to be rifled without striking a blow to stop it."

"It was a daring thing to do, sir," Hal ventured, with another salute.

"It was my plainest sort of duty, as an officer," replied Major Davis, returning the salute.

"May I ask, sir," ventured Hal, "whether it would have been our duty, had we been armed, and you not on the train?"

"Not unless led by an officer," replied the major. "But where did you young men learn to obey so promptly, and without questioning or hesitation?"

"At the recruit rendezvous, sir."

"Which one?"

"At Bedloe's Island, sir."

"Who was your instructor?"

"One of them, sir, was a namesake of yours—Corporal Davis."

"He will be glad to hear of this," nodded the major, smiling. "Corporal Davis is my son."

"Your son, sir—an enlisted man?" stammered Hal.

"Yes. My son enlisted in order to try to win a commission. Thank you, men, and good-night. I will tell the sheriff's men that you will be found at Fort Clowdry if you are wanted as witnesses."

Again acknowledging their salutes, Major Davis stepped inside.

Hal and Noll waited a moment before entering the station. When they did so, and passed on to the lunch room, they saw Major Davis at a table in one corner, so the rookies passed on to stools before the lunch counter.

"How long have we to eat?" asked Hal, of one of the trainmen.

"You've about twenty-two minutes left."

"I feel as if I could make excellent use of all the time," laughed Hal.

He and Noll plunged into hot chicken, potatoes and gravy, and plenty of side dishes. The late excitement had not destroyed the appetite of either recruit.

When they had finished Hal asked the waiter:

"How much do we owe you?"

"Nothing," replied the waiter. "I was told to say that the account is settled, with Major Davis's compliments."

Both recruits turned, saluting in the major's

direction, as token of their thanks. He nodded, smiling.

Out on the platform, just before the train started, the recruits saw Major Davis again. That officer was turned halfway from them, without seeing them, so they passed along to the day coach in which they had been riding.

Now a dozen men crowded about them, eager to talk with the young heroes of the night.

"Pretty gritty work that you boys did," grinned one of the men. "Do you often have things like that to do in the Army?"

"We never did, before to-night," Hal answered quietly.

"Must take a lot of nerve."

"We didn't think of it at the time," smiled Hal. "It seemed all in the way of business."

"You ought to have seen the folks you left behind here," put in another man.

"Oh, shut up," called others.

"No, I won't," retorted the last speaker. "What do you suppose we folks that you left behind in this car were doing?"

"Nothing very noisy, was it?" queried Hal.

"Not particularly," admitted the man, with a laugh. "We were lying along the aisle, or else we crawled under seats. At one time there were altogether too many bullets hitting the side of the car, or coming through the windows. None

of us in here got hit, but that was because of the good care we took of ourselves."

"Oh, we might have done something," protested another man, "only we didn't have anything to shoot with."

"These two young soldiers didn't have anything to shoot with, either, at the outset of the trouble. They hustled outside and got their guns from the enemy."

"Got any of those guns now?" asked another passenger, crowding forward. "Want to sell any of 'em?"

"We haven't even a cartridge," Hal replied.

"What did you do with them?"

"Turned them over to the sheriff's officers, of course."

It was nearly an hour before the curious passengers would consent to leave the young soldiers to themselves. Noll finally managed to convey an excellent hint by leaning back in his seat and closing his eyes as if in sleep.

Hal dozed somewhat, but by one o'clock in the morning both recruits were wide awake.

"What time are we due at Clowdry?" Hal asked the passing brakeman.

"More'n an hour late," answered the trainman.

"Whew! That means we won't get there until after three in the morning," muttered Hal.

"I wish we wouldn't get there until daylight," rejoined Noll. "Then I'd feel like dropping back for another nap."

Nearly everyone else in the car was dozing, it being after midnight.

It was half-past three o'clock in the morning when the brakeman rested his hand on Hal's shoulder.

"We ought to be at Clowdry in five minutes now," said the brakeman.

"Much obliged," Overton answered. "Thank goodness, Noll."

By the time that the train slowed up both recruits were out on the rear platform of the car, each gripping his canvas case.

"Clowdry! Clowdry!" bawled the brakeman.

Hal and Noll dropped off into the black night. The only light was in the station, past which the train slowly rolled.

There was no one in the station save the telegraph operator. On these mountain divisions, where accidents may so easily happen, a night operator is kept at every station.

Hal and Noll stood on the station platform until the train had pulled out. Then, as their eyes became more accustomed to the darkness, they made out what appeared to be a small hotel on the other side of the track. There were two

or three other buildings near by that looked like dwellings.

"Clowdry is a pretty large city," observed Noll, with a grin.

The real town was nearly a mile away.

"I wonder where the fort is," returned Hal.
"We'll ask the operator."

Apparently the operator was too well accustomed to seeing soldiers to take any deep interest in this new pair. But he was obliging, at any rate.

"Wait a minute," he called back, in answer to Private Overton's question, "and I'll go and show you the road."

So the two soldiers stood by their canvas cases until the operator had finished at his clicking instruments. Then the operator came out, heading for the rear door of the station.

"I'll show you from here, Jack," called the operator. "You see that road? Follow it about a half a mile; take the first turn to the left, and then keep straight on until you come to the fort."

"How far is Fort Clowdry?" Hal wanted to know.

"About three miles from here."

"Good road?" questioned Noll.

"Tenderfeet, ain't you?" asked the operator, smiling.

"Yes," admitted Hal.

"Thought you must be," nodded the operator, "else you'd know that the road between an Army post and the nearest freight station is always a good one. Them Army wagon bosses would put up a fearful holler if they had to drive the transport wagons over bad roads. Just joining?"

"Yes," assented Hal.

"Good luck to you! Well, follow the road and you can't have any trouble."

"Thank you, and good-night," came from both recruits. Then, each taking a new grip on his canvas case, which was fairly heavy, the recruits started down the road.

They came, finally, to the turn to the left.

"These equipment cases don't grow any lighter with distance, do they?" laughed Hal.

"Mine doesn't," grunted Noll.

When they had walked on a good deal farther Noll remarked:

"I wish we had that operator here?"

"What for?"

"He told us it was three miles. We could ask him what kind of miles."

"There's daylight coming," nodded Hal, pointing to the east. "That will make the distance seem shorter."

The sun up, at last, gave the recruits their

first glimpse of their first station in the Army. Fort Clowdry lay before them. There were no frowning parapets, no stone battlements, no cannon in sight. Fort Clowdry, as seen at the distance, consisted of a great number of buildings, of all sizes.

Boom! went a gun suddenly.

"Great!" cried Hal, his eyes shining. "That's the essence of the soldier's life—the sunrise gun. The Flag has just been hauled up."

In the middle distance the recruits caught sight of a soldier pacing, his gun, with bayonet fixed, at shoulder arms.

"That sentry will put us on the rest of our way," predicted Noll.

It being now broad daylight the sentry did not challenge the newcomers.

CHAPTER XIII

“TWO NEW GENERALS AMONG US”

“SENTRY, we’re recruit privates, joining the regiment at this station,” announced Hal. “Where do we report?”

Bringing his rifle to port arms the soldier replied: “This is post number seven. You’ll find post number one at that building under the fir-tree. That’s the guard-house. Report, first, to the corporal of the guard.”

“Thank you, Sentry.”

“Welcome.”

Bringing his piece to shoulder arms, the sentry resumed his pacing.

Hal and Noll now followed a well-kept road to the guard-house. Outside stood the corporal of the guard for this relief. As he gazed at the young soldiers, noting their canvas cases, he did not need to be told that they were recruits. None but recruits have cases the pattern they were carrying.

“Corporal,” reported Hal, “we are Privates Overton and Terry, under orders to join the Thirty-fourth.”

“Take seats inside, then,” said the corporal. “Go to sleep in your chairs, if you want to.”

Several other privates, belonging to the guard, were dozing in chairs. But Hal and Noll felt now too wide awake to think of dozing. They longed to step outside for a better look at this post, which was to be their future home. Yet, having been directed to remain inside, they obeyed.

It was a long while afterward before a bugler blew the first call to reveille, which is the "Army alarm clock," the signal to rise.

"Attention!" called the corporal, a few minutes afterward.

All the dozers sprang to their feet, standing at attention.

The officer of the day entered, looking over the men.

Then his glance fell upon the recruits.

"You are new men joining?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," Hal and Noll answered, presenting their orders.

"Corporal, when mess call sounds send a private of the guard with these men to put them in D Company's mess for their first meal."

"Very good, sir."

"Overton and Terry, you will report at the adjutant's office promptly at nine o'clock."

"Very good, sir."

The officer remained to glance over the guard report, then went away.

"When does that mess call sound, Corporal?" asked Hal.

"Five minutes more. Bates, you'll take the recruits to D Company's mess."

Nor did either recruit feel sorry when he was ushered into the enlisted men's mess, near barracks.

"Attention!" roared one waggish soldier.

As by instinct the men in the room stood at attention.

"Two new young generals are honoring us this morning," grinned the wag.

"Throw him out!" growled a sergeant. "It's bad enough to be a rookie without having it rubbed in."

The first sergeant now gave the seating order, and the men fell in at table. The wag sat at Noll's left.

"I find I'm mistaken," called the wag, down the table. "Our guests are only colonels."

"You'll be a general, one of these days, if you don't look out, Fowler," warned another soldier near by.

"The gypsies always told my mother I'd be a general," replied Fowler complacently.

"Yes, a general prisoner," continued the soldier who had just warned the wag.

This raised a prompt laugh, for, in the Army, a "general prisoner" is one who is serving a

term of confinement after sentence by a general court-martial.

"There are generals, and generals, of course," admitted Fowler.

"There'd be a general famine, Fowler, if you ever stopped talking at mess long enough to do all the eating that your mouth calls for."

"How long have you young gentlemen been out of West Point?" asked Fowler, turning to Noll.

Noll grinned, but did not make any answer to this question.

"I hope you are West Pointers," continued the company wag. "Nearly all of the gentlemen present are West Pointers."

"Give the rooks time to eat their meal in comfort," ordered a sergeant gruffly. "Have you forgotten the day, Fowler, when you were the greenest rook that the Thirty-fourth ever had?"

"I never was a rook," retorted Fowler.

"You never got beyond being one," retorted a corporal. "Don't mind this chin-bugler, lads. He doesn't know any better."

Hal was paying attention strictly to the meal before him. A good-sized piece of steak and a dish of baked potatoes had come his way, and he enjoyed them keenly. The men of this battalion had a first class commissary officer and lived well.

"You've visiting cards with you, of course?" continued Fowler, after a few moments.

"No," Noll admitted.

"Why, rook, you'll need cards. You've got to call on the K. O. (commanding officer) after breakfast. But we'll fix you out. I'll lend you my pack. The jack of clubs is the one you want to send in to the K. O. Then he'll know 'tis a husky lad that has honored the Thirty-fourth by joining."

"You'll live most of the time at the guard-house, if you take Fowler for your authority on doughboy life," broke in a quiet soldier across the table.

"More likely the happy house would be our address," laughed Hal.

"Doughboy" is the term applied to an infantry soldier. Hal and Noll, being in an infantry regiment, had thereby become doughboys. The "happy house" is the part of a military hospital where mild cases of insanity are confined.

The meal was soon over, and the first sergeant took the trouble to go up to the boys.

"When do you report at the adjutant's office?" he asked.

"At nine o'clock, Sergeant," Hal responded.

"Then, as long as you don't bother anyone else, you can just as well stroll where you please around the post, until nine," continued the ser-

geant. "Of course you know that nine o'clock means nine to the very minute?"

"We were taught a lot about punctuality at the rendezvous station," Hal answered.

"Punctuality is about the greatest virtue in Army life," nodded the first sergeant of D Company, as he moved away.

In the interval of time at their disposal Hal and Noll were able to see a good deal of Fort Clowdry.

The center of the life there was the great parade ground, a level, grassy plain.

At the north end of this plain stood a row of pretty dwellings. The largest was the residence of Colonel North, commanding officer of the Thirty-fourth. Next to the colonel's residence was that of Major Silsbee, the battalion commander. Past the major's residence was a row of somewhat smaller cottages, each the home of a married officer. The name and rank of each officer was on a doorplate. At the furthest end of the row from Colonel North's dwelling was a building containing quarters for bachelor officers.

On another side of the parade ground were various buildings devoted to the life of the post. There was an Officers' Club, a library, a gymnasium, and at one corner, the post hospital.

Further away from the parade ground were

the quarters of enlisted married men, and, beyond that, the barracks of the four companies of the Thirty-fourth stationed at Fort Clowdry. Chapel also faced the parade ground, and, near it, a Y. M. C. A. building.

Further away was the power house, for the buildings and roads on the post were lighted by electricity.

"Have we time to go over to the power house?" asked Noll.

"We haven't," decided Hal, after consulting his watch. "In twelve minutes we must be at the adjutant's office."

"Here comes an officer," whispered Noll.

Both young soldiers were alert as a first lieutenant came down the road toward them. At the same instant Hal and Noll raised their right hands smartly in salute, which was promptly returned by that officer.

They had already inquired where the adjutant's office was located. Having passed the officer, our young recruits now hastened over to the headquarters building.

"Adjutant's office?" inquired Hal of an orderly before a door.

"Right inside," nodded the orderly.

Noll fell in behind Hal as the latter stepped into the office. At a flat-top desk sat a battalion sergeant-major, who is the non-commis-

sioned assistant of the adjutant, as the regimental sergeant-major is the non-commissioned assistant of the regimental adjutant.

At a roll-top desk in another corner of the office the adjutant himself, a first lieutenant, was seated.

"We are recruits reporting, Sergeant," announced Hal, in a low tone.

"You have your orders with you?" asked the sergeant-major.

"Yes, Sergeant." Hal handed both sets of papers to his questioner.

At the same time each recruit was alert to salute the officer at the roll-top desk, in case he should look up. But he didn't until the battalion sergeant-major placed the papers on his desk.

"Come here, men," directed the officer.

Both rookies stepped over to his desk, halted and saluted.

"Recruit Privates Overton and Terry?" asked the adjutant, after a glance at the papers.

"Yes, sir."

The adjutant turned to examine a list that lay on his desk.

"Private Overton to B Company. Private Terry to C Company."

From an inner room stepped out a gray-haired officer, wearing on his shoulder-straps the

silver eagles of a colonel. This must be Colonel North, the Thirty-fourth's K. O. Both recruits immediately came to the salute again.

"These are the young men I wanted to see, are they not, Wright?" asked the colonel.

"They are, sir," replied the adjutant, rising.

"Major Silsbee!" called the colonel, looking over one shoulder.

That officer entered, also from the inner room, and again the recruits saluted.

"Major," went on the colonel, "these are the young men I told you about, who are joining your battalion."

Major Silsbee looked them over keenly, even if briefly.

"They look the part, Colonel," was the major's comment.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SQUAD ROOM HAZING

“**M**EN, we have had word of you in advance of your coming,” continued the colonel.

“Yes, sir,” replied Hal.

“Very good word, indeed. It seems that you took stirring part in assisting an Army officer last night.”

“We obeyed Major Davis’s orders, sir, if that is what you refer to,” Hal assented, once more saluting.

“And did it in a manner that distinguishes you as good soldiers, eh, major?” went on the colonel, turning to Major Silsbee.

“Yes,” replied Major Silsbee. “Major Davis’s commendation is not earned except by merit.”

“You are surprised, I take it,” resumed Colonel North, bending a shrewd yet kindly glance on the recruits, “that we should already know of your conduct last night. Major Davis wired me concerning it from Salida last night. Men, this is a very good start, or, rather, a second one, for your record, as forwarded me from the recruit rendezvous, mentions that you have

already been commended in orders for aiding in preventing the escape of a prisoner. You start well, men, in the Thirty-fourth. Report to your respective first sergeants that, with the approval of your company commanders, you will not take up with duty until to-morrow. That will give you time to look about the post. If you wish, you have also permission to be off post this afternoon, for three hours beginning at two o'clock. That is all."

"Thank you, sir," acknowledged each recruit, saluting. Then they stepped forth.

"At the rate we're getting commended, we ought soon to be brigadier generals," smiled Hal.

"A second lieutenancy, even after four years, will suit me well enough," retorted Noll. "But what shall we do now?"

"Plainly enough our first duty is to report to our first sergeants, as ordered."

"Too bad we couldn't be bunkies, in the same company," murmured Noll.

"Yes; I would rather have had it that way. But I take it that one of the first lessons a fellow has to learn in the Army is that he can't have things his own way."

"At all events we can be together during a good deal of our leisure time," declared Noll.

"Nothing—not even being half the world

apart—could prevent our being chums, old fellow.”

Reaching barracks each recruit inquired where to find his own first sergeant. Hal was soon facing Sergeant Gray, of B Company. The first sergeant of a company is a highly important man. He is the ranking non-commissioned officer of his company, and might aptly be termed the “foreman” of the company. He lives right with his company all the time, and knows each man thoroughly. The first sergeant is responsible to the company commander for the discipline and order of the company.

“Is your name Overton?” asked Sergeant Gray, holding out his hand. “Glad to have you with us, Overton. You’ll bunk in Sergeant Hupner’s squad room. Remember that, when there’s anything you really need to know, the non-commissioned officers of the company are paid to instruct you. Don’t be afraid to ask necessary questions.”

“I won’t, thank you, Sergeant.”

“And don’t be sensitive or foolish, Overton, about any little pranks some of the men are more or less bound to play upon you at first. The easiest way to keep out of trouble is to be good-natured all the time. But that doesn’t mean that you have to submit to any abuse.”

“Thank you, Sergeant.”

"Now, I'll take you to Sergeant Hupner."

That was more easily said than done. Sergeant Gray took Hal to the squad room in which he was to live thereafter, but Hupner was out at the time.

"Just stay here a little while, and report to Sergeant Hupner when he comes in," directed the first sergeant. "He'll assign you to a bed and make you feel at home."

Hardly had Sergeant Gray closed the door when Hal thought he had taken the measure of the eight other privates present. They looked like a clean, capable and genial lot of young fellows. He was speedily to find that they were "genial" enough.

"So you want to be a regular, do you?" quizzed one of the soldiers, halting before Hal, and looking him over.

"Why, I am one already, am I not?" asked Hal, smiling.

"No, sir, you're not," retorted the questioner. "How did you start in? Made a grand stand play on the train last night, didn't you? Helped to shoot up a lot of train robbers, didn't you?"

"That was under orders of an Army officer," Hal replied good-naturedly. The other soldiers had crowded about the pair.

"You went and played the hero, didn't you?" persisted the questioner. "Probably you didn't

know that a regular is never allowed to be a hero. Heroes serve only in the volunteers."

This is a well-known joke in the Army. In war time local pride in the volunteer regiments is always strong. Local newspapers always devote most of their war space to the "heroic" doings of the local volunteer regiment. The regulars do the bulk of the fighting, and the most dangerous, but their deeds of daring are rarely chronicled in the newspapers. All the praise goes to the volunteer regiments. Hence, in war time, a stock Army question is, "Are you a hero or a regular?"

"I guess you've made a mistake," remonstrated Hal, still good-naturedly. "My friend and I didn't do anything in the heroic line. We simply fired when told to, and stopped firing, when told to. We didn't make any charges, capture any forts, or do anything in the least heroic. We simply stood by and did what the major told us."

"Good," nodded one of the other men. "The kid is bound to be a regular, all right. He doesn't brag, and I don't believe he's looking for any write-up in the newspapers."

"How did you feel under fire last night?" continued the merciless questioner. "Brave as a lion?"

"Don't you believe it," laughed Hal.

"Were you cool under fire?"

"Yes; I was!" Hal's answer leaped forth. "Cool? Why, man, I was so cold that it took me an hour, afterwards, to get warm again."

"He's got you there, Hyman," laughed another soldier. "Oh, the kid's going to be one of us, all right. He's no bouquet chaser."

"I don't know about that," replied Private Hyman gravely. "So many heroes in disguise try to sneak in among the regulars that it pays us to keep our eyes open. What sort of a medal are you going to order from Congress, kid?"

"A leather one," smiled Hal, "though I'd really prefer a tin medal."

Good-natured laughter greeted this answer.

But Private Hyman persisted:

"In war time you'd chuck us, just to get a commission in the volunteers, wouldn't you?"

"Not even for a general's commission in the volunteers," retorted Hal.

"Are you good at athletics?"

"No."

"Know anything about gymnastics?"

"Only one or two things."

"Come down to the end of the room with me," ordered Private Hyman.

Hal good-naturedly followed. So did the others.

"Now, let's see if you can do this," Hyman

proposed. "Take a good start and jump over the first cot, then over the second, and right on down the line, as far as you can do."

That didn't look difficult. Hal leaped over the first cot, then, with hardly a pause, jumped over the second. So on he went, down over the line of ten cots.

"Now, go back again, over the cots on the other side," ordered Private Hyman.

Hal did so without difficulty, though he was flushed and panting by the time that he finished this brisk exercise.

"Kid, you're no good," grunted Hyman.

"I didn't try to make you believe I was any good," Hal retorted calmly.

"No, sir! Any man who jumps as easily and naturally as you do would jump the regulars any time, and go with the high-toned volunteer crowd."

"Humph! A fellow who can jump like that would jump right out of the service at the first breath of trouble," broke in another soldier.

"He'd desert," agreed a third.

"Walk on your hands?" queried Hyman.

Hal proved that he could do so by throwing his heels up into the air and taking a dozen steps on his hands before he again came to an erect attitude.

"Brains are all in your heels," remarked

Private Hyman thoughtfully. "Can you pick that man up and carry him around on your back?"

The soldier indicated weighed at least a hundred and sixty pounds.

"I'll try," nodded Hal. Backing up to the soldier, he locked elbows, back to back, lifted the heavy one to his back and carried him twenty feet down the squad room.

"Any fellow with all that strength in his back would get his back up at trouble, and back out of any fight that came his way," declared Private Hyman. "But see here, can you place your head on one chair and your feet on another, stiffen your body and lie there without touching the floor in any way."

"Let's see," proposed Hal. Two chairs were quickly swung forward. Hal, who had good muscular control, took the attitude named, stiffened his body, and lay between the chairs for some moments.

"He lies well and easily," observed one of the onlookers.

"Yes," agreed Private Hyman. "He's easily the champion liar of the company."

At that Hal sprang to his feet again.

As he did so he accidentally pushed one of the chairs over backward. It was close to the door, which, at that instant, opened. The flying

chair struck the incomer across his shins, bringing an angry exclamation from the man.

"Don't you know anything, rook?" demanded the man, Private Bill Hooper. Hooper stood five feet ten in his socks. He was just under thirty, a man who was not popular in the company because of his unruly temper.

"I'm sorry," apologized Hal. "I didn't know you were there."

"You'll be sorrier, now," cried Hooper fiercely. Striding up to young Overton, Hooper landed a sound box on one of the boy's ears.

Hal flushed crimson in an instant.

CHAPTER XV

PRIVATE BILL HOOPER LEARNS

“**H** OLD on, Hooper!”
“Don’t act like a dog!”
“He’s only a kid—can’t you see?”

Then something happened like lightning.

Private Hal Overton had meant to take all his hazing good-humoredly. But a blow struck in anger, and without just cause, was more than he was prepared to brook.

“Sergeant Gray told me I was not expected to stand abuse,” flashed through his mind.

So, instead of cringing away from a repetition of the blow, Hal took a sudden bound forward.

Whack!

“I have no use for a box on the ear,” smiled Hal grimly. “So you can have it back!”

Private Bill Hooper let out a roar, then sprang for the boy, intending to pulverize the young rookie with his fists. But five or six of the men sprang between them, forming an effective human wall.

“Shame on you, Hooper!”

“That’s no way for a man to act.”

“Get off your blouse, kid,” blustered Private

Hooper, as he unfastened his own blouse and tossed it over the end of a cot. "You need a trimming, and you're going to get it right now!"

"Here, kid, button your blouse up again," ordered Private Hyman. "You ain't called upon to fight that bully. Hooper, if you're spoiling for fight I'll do my best to be kind to you."

But Hal, the flush dying from his cheeks, coolly continued unbuttoning his blouse. Then he pulled it off, handing it to a soldier near by.

"Dress yourself, kid. You don't have to fight a man twice your size."

"Let some one else have the job, kid. There's some of us here will take it."

"The kid will stand up and take his own trimming," announced Hooper, with ugly emphasis.

"No, no, no!"

"Beat it, Hooper!"

"Mates," went on Hal, as soon as he could make himself heard, "I'm willing to stand for anything that's coming to a rook. But this is a case that calls for something different. I've got to satisfy this man that I can stand up before a pair of fists, or he'll never respect me enough to let me alone."

"Why, kid, a man of Hooper's size will reduce you to powder," objected Hyman seri-

ously. "It's all right to have sand, and I guess you've got it, but you've no call to be slaughtered."

"He'll thrash me," agreed Hal coolly, "but I'll get in enough on him to make him want to let me alone after this. I'm ready for the fellow."

Realizing that the rookie was in earnest the soldiers stepped away from between the pair.

"But you play fair, Hooper, or we'll kick you all over the squad room," warned another soldier.

Private Hooper clenched his fists, and stood flexing his arms, which, through his shirt-sleeves, appeared to be decidedly powerful.

"Step up, kid, and get your trimming," he invited, with a ferocious smile.

"I don't know much about fighting," admitted Hal, smiling pleasantly. "All I know my dancing teacher taught me."

That raised a laugh and angered Hooper. This was just what the rookie wanted to do, for he judged that Hooper could be prodded into a blind rage.

Hooper now jumped forward, aiming an ugly swing for Hal's head. But the rookie sidestepped swiftly out of the way. As he did so, one foot dragged in front of the advancing bully. Hooper tripped over that foot, and the

force of his swing carried him forward so that he fell flat on his face.

"Too bad! I hope you didn't hurt yourself," teased Hal sweetly, whirling about like a flash.

Hooper was up with an oath, wind-milling his big arms.

"Take that!" he roared, aiming a heavy blow straight at Hal's chest.

"Against the rules of my dancing master!" mimicked Hal, bounding to the left. As he did so he let his right fist drop on the point of Hooper's chin.

"Ugh!" grunted the bully.

"Spit it out, if it got in your mouth," advised Hal unconcernedly, as he again faced his antagonist.

From the way he dodged the next six or eight assaults it did look as though Hal had spoken the truth when he stated that he had learned his style of fighting from a dancing master. For the nimble rookie never did seem to be just where Bill Hooper looked for him when landing blows.

"Take your partners!" mocked Hal Overton, as he darted past again. This time, however, he landed a very hot and powerful blow right against Hooper's right eye.

Now cautious cries of approval went up from the other men crowding about. All of the men

were careful not to make much noise, through fear of bringing interference.

A minute later Hooper received such a stinging blow on the nose that it brought a little trickle of red.

“Woof!” panted Hal, in going by again.

“Woof!” echoed Hooper. “Wow—ow—ugh!”

Then he doubled up, winded, for Hal, after fainting for the big fellow’s face had calmly but forcefully struck him just above the beltline. Hooper was out of it for the present, and he knew it.

“Now sail in and finish him, rook!” called four or five men at once.

“Not this time,” replied Hal, going over to the soldier who held his blouse, taking the garment and putting it on. “I’ll save the rest for the next dance whenever Hooper feels festive.”

Grateful that he didn’t have to stand and take punishment in his present condition, Hooper groped to a chair and sat down.

“Now, then, mates,” announced Hal modestly, “when we were interrupted I was trying to show you that I don’t ache to be a hero. Being a regular is good enough for me. I am ready to answer any further questions.”

But just at that moment a bugle sounded the call to drill.

"You've answered enough questions for the present, rook," replied Private Hyman, patting Overton on the shoulder as he went by. Hooper struggled into his blouse, then went over to a sink and washed the red from his nose before hurrying out with the others. The big private didn't even look at Hal Overton as he went by.

Being excused from duty for the day, Hal went in search of Noll Terry. He found him waiting outside of barracks.

"Whew, but I've been through a mill," sighed Noll.

"I've been ground just a bit myself," laughed Hal.

"Did the fellows twit you about last night's work?" asked Noll curiously.

"Well, some," admitted Hal.

"If there's anything left that the fellows in the squad room can think of to do to me, I'm wondering what it is," grunted Private Terry.

"Oh, they'll think up enough things," Hal declared. "We needn't imagine that our mates will exhaust themselves in twenty minutes of fun. You didn't lose your temper, did you, Noll?"

"No; and I don't want to. But there's one fellow in our room that I am certain I'll have to fight before I get through."

"There's a fellow in our room that I don't

believe I will have to fight," chuckled Private Overton.

"Have you been in a fight already?" asked Noll, flashing a swift look at his chum.

"Oh, no," Hal answered. "A dancing lesson was as far as I got this morning. But come along, Noll. I want to get where we can get a look at the great mountains yonder. My, how they seem to tower above the fort and wall us in!"

Fort Clowdry was some fifty-two hundred feet above sea level. From there, however, high mountains were visible that extended some thousands of feet higher in the air. All about was a great view of rugged mountain scenery.

Over past the buildings at the west end of the post the two rookies wandered. Now they had a noble view of the mountains.

"Are you going off post this afternoon, as the colonel said we could?" asked Noll, by and by.

"Not unless you very much want to, Noll. Can't we put in the time better learning our way around the post?"

"Perhaps we can," assented Noll.

A soldier came along, driving a pair of mules to which a quarter master's wagon was hitched. As he drew near, with a heavy load aboard, he halted to rest the mules.

"Rooks, ain't ye?" questioned the soldier.

"Yes," admitted Hal.

"Taking a survey of the post?"

"Rather. We don't have to report for duty until to-morrow."

After a few moments the soldier climbed down from the seat of the wagon. He was wholly willing to tell the boys whatever they wanted to know about Fort Clowdry and to point out the features of interest in the surrounding lines of mountains.

"Ever go hunting?" asked the soldier, at last.

"Yes; after squirrels and partridges," laughed Hal.

"No real hunting, though?"

"None."

"Then, if you can keep out of discipline troubles, ye'll have some fun around here by and by."

"Soldiers don't have much time for hunting, do they?" Hal asked.

"Those that know how to hunt do," replied the older soldier. "That's part of the life here. Didn't ye ever hear about soldier hunting parties?"

"I certainly haven't," Hal admitted.

"Why, men of good conduct are often allowed to go off on hunting parties when the game's running right. Generally there's six or eight men to a party, and all have to be fair shots, for

the K. O. doesn't aim to have too much ammunition wasted," explained the old soldier. "One of the party is a non-com and he has charge of the party."

"What do the hunters get?" queried Hal.

"Well, for bigger game, bear and mountain antelope mostly. Then some parties go after birds; there's plenty of them, too, in the mountains, at the right seasons."

"Say!" exploded Noll, his eyes shining.

"Think ye'd like to go on a hunting party, do ye?" asked the soldier. "Get up yer record for marksmanship, then."

"What's done with the game?" asked Noll innocently.

"What——" the soldier started to repeat. Then he added, dryly:

"Oh, we send the game to the hospitals in Denver and Pueblo, of course!"

"Don't we get any of it to eat?" asked Noll, looking up.

"Say, don't ever go off with a party that doesn't bring back a big haul of game," advised the older soldier. "If ye do, the company cooks will lynch ye. Why, that's what we go hunting for—to vary the bill of fare here at the post. Sometimes, when we're all just aching for bear steaks, an officer and twenty or thirty men all hike off at once into the mountain trails. There

are plenty of game dinners at Clowdry, at different times in the year."

Then the soldier climbed leisurely to the seat of his wagon and started on again.

"I wonder if he was fooling us about hunting parties," mused Hal.

Later on, however, the rookies discovered that the soldier had told them the truth. On some of the Western posts, hunting forms one of the diversions of the men.

Presently they met another soldier, this time afoot.

"How far can we go without getting off the reservation?" Hal inquired.

"The way you're headed now you can go another mile without getting off limits," the soldier replied.

"Reservation" is a term applied to the limits of an Army post. Wherever an Army post exists it includes land reserved by the United States from the jurisdiction of the individual state. Hence the name of reservation.

It was wilder country out here, away from the well-kept roads.

"Come on," urged Hal. "I'm going to take a good walk yet."

They had gone along, briskly, for at least another half mile when some flying missile went by Hal's head. Noll, who was just behind him,

saw the missile, and watched it land on the ground beyond.

"Whoever is throwing rocks of that size—quit!" shouted Noll, wheeling to his left and glaring at an irregularly-shaped ledge some sixty yards away.

"Let's see who it is, anyway," cried Hal, darting toward the ledge.

By the time they reached the ledge they heard some lively scrambling among the rocks beyond, but neither rookie could see anyone. All was quiet for a few moments. Then a foot slipped on a stone, at a little distance. Hal raced straight in the direction of the sound. He was in time to see a crouching, running figure darting in and out among the rocks.

"Come on, Noll! We've got him!" yelled Hal.

In another minute they had overtaken the fugitive, who now stood panting at bay.

"Well, you're a nice one!" ejaculated Private Hal Overton.

"Tip Branders—out here in Colorado!" ejaculated Noll Terry.

"No; my name ain't Branders. Ye've got me mixed up with somebody else!" glowered the young man at bay.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MYSTERY OF POST THREE

“**O**H, no, your name isn't Tip Branders!”
mocked Hal Overton.

“That's what I said,” retorted the
young man at bay.

“Then how do you know who we are?”

“I don't know who ye are, and what's more,
I don't care,” retorted the other.

“Tip, I guess you've forgotten to write home
lately,” broke in Noll. “What would you say
if you should hear that your uncle in Australia
had died and left your mother more than two
million dollars?”

The young man's eyes opened very wide indeed. He gasped, and then his eyes flashed eagerly.

“Has the old lady all that money?” he demanded. “Noll Terry, what else do you know about it?”

The young man came briskly forward now, all trembling with eagerness.

“I don't know anything at all about it,” retorted Noll coolly, “and I don't believe it either.”

“But you said——”

"Oh, Tip, what an idiot you are to think you can deny your identity to us," jeered Noll, while Hal laughed merrily.

"Say, if you're trying to have sport with me," snarled Tip, "I'll——"

"Is it your idea of sport to shy rocks at us?" demanded Private Hal.

"I didn't shy anything at you," asserted Tip sullenly.

"Why, for that matter," Hal went on jeeringly, "I don't suppose you'll even admit that you're here, at all?"

"Don't get too festive, just because you've got the government's blue clothes on," Tip retorted sullenly. "A plain, ordinary soldier ain't such a much."

"Opinions may differ about that, of course," Hal admitted. "But being a soldier was too much of a job for you to get a chance at, wasn't it, Tip?"

"I'm just as well suited as it is," rejoined Tip, flushing a bit, none the less.

"You haven't told us what you're doing out in this country," Noll suggested.

"And I don't know that it's any of your business, either," Branders went on. "Ain't nothing to be ashamed of, though. You know I used to travel a bit with the political crowd at home."

"With the heelers of the city," Noll amended.

Tip scowled, but continued:

"Well, I got into a bit of a row, that's all. So I lit out until things could blow over a bit."

"And took some of your mother's cash before you left, I heard," nodded Private Noll Terry.

"She gave it to me," cried Tip fiercely. "Now, see here, don't you fellows say nothing about seeing me out in this part of the country. I'm out here trying to run down a good, new start in life. You just keep your tongues behind your teeth as far as my affairs are concerned."

"What kind of a new start can you make out in these hills?" queried Hal.

"That's what I'm here to find out. My cash has about run out, so I'm walking. I'm bound for a ranch about forty miles west of here, where I expect to land a job. So don't you go to talking too much about me, and trying to spoil me."

"Why did you try to knock me over with a small-sized boulder?" Hal insisted.

"Because I wanted to play a joke on you," retorted Tip, with a grin.

"That's a lie, but let it go at that," rejoined Hal Overton. "It would be too much, anyway, wouldn't it, Tip, to expect the truth from you?"

"You always were down on me," replied Branders half coaxingly. "If you'd only taken more trouble to understand me you'd have understood that I'm not a half bad fellow."

"No; only about nine-tenths bad," grimaced Noll derisively.

"Well, there's no use in my staying here to talk with you fellows," muttered Tip angrily. "You never were friends of mine. So I'll be on my way."

"Tramping it for forty miles, are you?" called Noll, as Tip turned away.

"'Bout that," Branders called back over his shoulder.

"Then, man alive, why don't you keep to the road, instead of scrambling over these rough boulders?"

Tip's only answer was a snort.

"Come back to the road," proposed Hal to his chum. So the two rookies clambered back over the ledge and down onto the excellent military road. But they caught no further glimpse of Tip Branders; plainly he preferred different paths.

"What do you make out of Tip?" asked Noll, a minute later.

"Nothing," Hal answered, "except that he was lying, as usual, of course. Tip never tells the truth; there's no sport in it."

"I'd like to know what he is doing out in this country."

"Oh, I reckon," suggested Hal, "that, as he couldn't be a soldier, he thought he'd take up cowboy life as the next best thing."

"He won't last long as a cowboy," laughed Noll. "Tip hates work, and the cowboy is about the hardest worked man in America."

"Well, we don't have to worry about Tip," muttered Hal. "We don't even have to talk about him. Noll, look at those noble old mountains!"

"Some day, when we have enough time off, we must walk to the mountains," urged Noll. "I wonder how many miles away they are—five, or six?"

"Hm!" laughed Hal. "I asked Sergeant Gray, and he said that range over there is about forty miles away."

"Forty!" Noll looked plainly unbelieving.

"You'll find out, Noll Terry, that the air in these glorious old Rocky Mountains is so mighty clear that you can't judge distances the way you did back East. I'd rather have Sergeant Gray's word than any evidence that my own eyes can supply me with."

"We won't get to that mountain range, then, until we have a week off," sighed Noll.

After wandering about for some time more

the young rookies strolled back to barracks. Hal had yet to find Sergeant Hupner and get assigned to a bed and a locker.

Hupner proved to be a rather short, but keen and very pleasant fellow. He was of German origin, but had no accent in his speech, having been educated in this country.

"You'll like the regiment, the battalion and B Company, Overton, when you get used to us," Sergeant Hupner informed the young rookie.

"I'm sure of it, Sergeant," Hal replied. "But it'll be far more to the point, won't it, if I make my comrades like me?"

"Oh, you'll get along all right," replied Hupner, who had had a report on the quiet of Hal's performance with big Bill Hooper that morning. "The main thing for a recruit, Overton, is not to act as if he knew it all until he really does. And no old soldier does claim to know too much. You'll have to fall in for dinner in about ten minutes. When the company assembles report to Sergeant Gray, who'll give you your place in the ranks."

When the two recruits marched into company mess, that noon, both Hal and Noll felt odd. The chums had not been used to being separated.

After dinner the two were together again, however. Guided by Hyman they went to the

recreation hall, on the second floor of barracks building. This hall was fitted up for games and sports, and at one end was a stage with scenery.

"Who gives the shows?" asked Hal.

"Once in a great while the men chip in from company funds to hire a real company, or troupe," replied Private Hyman. "The officers always add something, then. But, more often, the men supply their own talent. We've got a lot of show talent of all sorts among nearly four hundred men."

Hyman was soon called away to a drill, though not before he had pointed out other places of interest. Hal and Noll went over to the library, the gym, and the Y. M. C. A. building. They wound up their afternoon of leisure by attending parade just before retreat. Retreat is always followed, immediately, by the firing of the sunset gun and the hauling down of the post Flag for the night.

When tattoo was sounded by the bugler that night both chums were glad enough to turn down their beds and get into them. Neither Hal nor Noll remained awake more than two minutes.

The windows were open, and a cool, delicious breeze, circulated through the squad room. Hal slept the sleep of the truly tired, hearing nothing of the martial snores of some of the

men on adjoining cots. It was late in the night when Private Overton was awakened by the sound of a rifle shot.

"I must have been dreaming through the scenes of last night again," Hal muttered drowsily.

None of the other men in the room appeared to have heard the sound at all.

But now it came again. A shot was followed by a second, then by a third.

"Corporal of the guard—post number three!" yelled a lusty voice, though the distance was such that Hal Overton heard the sound only faintly.

Crack—crack!

Then a bugle pealed on the air, though still Hal's comrades in the squad room slumbered on.

Too curious to turn over and go to sleep again, Hal stole softly from his cot and reached an open window on the side that looked out over the parade.

There was no moon, but in the light of the stars Hal could see several uniformed men running swiftly across the parade ground to officers' row.

"It's no dream," muttered Overton, intensely interested, "for there goes the corporal with the guard. What on earth can it mean?"

There was something up—and something exciting, at that, for experienced sentries never fire except in case of need. Moreover, several sentries—no fewer than four—had just fired almost simultaneously.

Nor did the corporal and his squad return within the next few minutes.

Whatever it was that had resulted in turning out the guard, the need for the guard plainly still continued.

“There’s no more shooting, anyway,” Hal reflected. “I may as well go back to bed.”

It was some minutes ere he could sleep. When he did fall off it seemed as though only a minute or two had passed when the bugle again pealed.

Hal was on his feet in a second. So were most of the other soldiers in the squad room this time.

“Why, it’s daylight now,” uttered Hal, looking astounded.

“Of course it is, rook,” laughed the soldier whose bed was next to Hal’s. “That bugler sounded first call to reveille. Don’t you know what that is yet?”

In other words the soldier’s alarm clock had “gone off.” Though all of these men had slept through the call for the corporal of the guard, simply because it did not concern them,

every man had turned out at the first or second note of "first call to reveille."

Every man dressed swiftly. As soon as he got his clothing on each soldier turned up his bedding according to the regulations.

There was some "policing" of the room done. That is, everything was made shipshape and tidy. Last of all, and within a very few minutes from the start, the men made their way briskly to the sinks, where soap and water, comb and brush, put on the finishing touches. A sergeant, two corporals and nearly a score of men were now as neat and clean as soldiers must ever be.

"What was that row in the night, Corporal? Do you know?" Hal asked.

"What row in the night?" asked Corporal Cotter.

"Why, there was a lot of shooting, and a call for the corporal of the guard to post number six."

"First I've heard of it," replied Corporal Cotter. "But we'll know before long. Now, step lively, rook, for you're on duty with the rest to-day."

By the time that Sergeant Gray's squad room emptied at the call of the bugle it was instantly plain outside that something unusual was going on.

A and D Companies, as they fell in, proved each to be twenty men short.

"There are extra guards out, and a picket down the road to town," muttered Private Hyman, who stood next to Hal in the ranks.

"What does it mean?" asked Hal Overton, but instantly his thoughts went back to the shots and the excitement of the night.

"Silence in the ranks," growled Corporal Cotter.

But at breakfast tongues were unloosed. Hal quickly told what little he had seen and heard in the night. Others passed the gossip that twenty men had been silently summoned from a squad room in A Company, and twenty more from a squad room in D Company.

"There's some mischief floating in the air—that's certain," muttered Private Hyman.

"How did you happen to be up to see and hear it all, Overton?" demanded Sergeant Gray.

Hal explained, frankly and briefly, but the sergeant's eyes were keenly questioning.

Before the meal was over the company commander, Captain Cortland, entered the room.

"Keep your seats, men. Go on with your breakfast. Sergeant Gray, I will speak with you for a moment."

The first sergeant hastily rose, going over to his captain and saluting. After the company

commander had gone, at the end of a brief, almost whispered conversation, Gray came back to his seat, looking wholly mysterious.

"B Company, rise," ordered the first sergeant, at the end of the meal. "Attention! The men of this company will have ten minutes for recreation, then be prepared to fall in at an extra inspection on the parade ground. After filing out of here no man will go indoors again before inspection."

"Is it to be inspection without arms, Sergeant Gray?" called Sergeant Hupner.

"Inspection just as you stand," replied Sergeant Gray, then gave the marching order.

"What on earth is up, Hal?" demanded Noll, when the two young rookies met outside of mess a few minutes later.

"I wish I knew," was Hal's puzzled reply.

CHAPTER XVII

HAL UNDER A FIRE OF QUESTIONS

IMMEDIATELY after the bugle call for assembly the four companies of the first battalion of the Thirty-fourth fell in by companies on the parade ground.

After roll-call had been read each company commander stepped before his own command.

“Was any man of B Company absent from his squad room at any time around two o’clock this morning?” called Captain Cortland, looking keenly over his command. Other company commanders were asking the same question. “If so, that man will fall out.”

Not a man fell out of any of the four companies.

“Was any man in B Company up and moving about the squad room at or about two o’clock this morning?” was Captain Cortland’s next question. “If so, fall out.”

Private Hal Overton quickly left his place in the ranks.

“Advance, Private Overton,” ordered Captain Cortland.

Hal stepped forward, halting six paces from his company commander and saluting.

"You were up and about in the squad room at that time, Private Overton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you leave the squad room?"

"No, sir."

"You are positive of that?"

"Positive, sir."

"You did not leave the squad room, even for a moment?"

"No, sir."

"What brought you out of your bed?"

"I heard shots, sir, and calls for the guard."

"What else did you see or hear, Private Overton?"

"I went to the window, and saw that there was some excitement up by the officers' quarters, sir."

"Then what did you do?"

"After listening and looking for some time, sir, I returned to my bed, wondering what it was all about."

Hal was the only soldier in the battalion who had fallen out of ranks.

"Follow me," ordered Captain Cortland. He led the young soldier back to where Adjutant Wright and the sergeant-major were standing by Major Silsbee.

"Lieutenant Wright," reported Captain Cortland, "Private Overton admits being up in

squad room at the time when the shots were fired in the dark hours this morning. He claims that he did not leave the squad room, and that it was the noise that woke him and made him curious."

"Go to my office, Private Overton, with Sergeant-major Beall," directed the adjutant briefly.

Hal and the sergeant-major saluted, then stepped away.

"Is it allowable, Sergeant, for a rookie to ask what this is all about?" asked Hal respectfully, as the two neared the adjutant's office at headquarters.

"You'd better not ask. I'm not going to tell you anything," replied Beall.

So Hal was silent, though he could hardly escape the feeling that he was being treated a good deal like a suspected criminal. Though he knew that he was innocent of any wrongdoing in connection with the excitement of the night before he could not help feeling undefined dread.

Lieutenant Wright speedily returned to his office, taking his seat at his desk. Hal was summoned and made to stand at attention before the adjutant.

"Now, Private Overton," began the adjutant, fixing a frigid gaze on the rookie, "you may as

well tell me all you know about last night's business."

Hal quickly told the little that he knew.

"Come, come, my man," retorted Lieutenant Wright, "that much won't do. Out with the rest of it."

"There isn't any 'rest of it' that I know of, sir," Private Hal answered respectfully.

"Now, my man——"

With that preliminary Lieutenant Wright proceeded to put the young recruit through a severe, grilling cross-examination. But Hal kept his head through it all, insisting that he had told all he knew.

"Overton," rapped in the adjutant, at last, "you are very new to the Army, and you don't appear to realize all the facilities we have for compelling men to speak. If you remain obtuse any longer, it may be necessary for me to order you to the guard-house under confinement."

"I am very sorry, Lieutenant," Hal replied, flushing, "that you will not believe me. On my word of honor as a soldier I have told you all that I know of the matter."

The adjutant bent forward, looking keenly into the rookie's eyes. Hal did not flinch, returning the gaze steadily, respectfully.

Then, in a somewhat less gruff tone, Lieutenant Wright continued:

"That is all for the present, Private Overton. Report to your company commander, at once."

The adjutant and sergeant-major left headquarters a moment later, going by a different path. As Hal glanced down the parade ground he saw the men out of ranks, though every man was still close to his place.

"Major," reported the adjutant, after the exchange of salutes between the officers, "Private Overton denies having left the squad room in the early hours this morning. For that matter, sir, if he had not been honest, he need not have reported that he was out of his bed, or that he heard the sentries' shots."

"It was well he did admit that much," replied the major, "for he let it out at company mess this morning."

"I went at the young recruit, sir, so severely that I was almost ashamed of myself," continued the adjutant. "I am under the impression, sir, that Private Overton told me the truth."

"So am I," admitted Major Silsbee thoughtfully. "His record, so far, is against the idea of his being mixed up in rascally business. I think it likely that Private Overton's extreme fault, if he is guilty of any, is that he is possibly shielding some other soldiers whom he saw

sneak back into barracks after the excitement was over. Probably he isn't even guilty of that much."

"Are you going to search the squad rooms, sir?" inquired the adjutant.

"Yes, Wright, though it makes me feel almost sick to put such an affront upon hundreds of innocent and decent men."

"The decent ones, sir, will welcome the search."

"That is what Colonel North told me. Summon the company commanders, and direct them to go into each squad room of their companies with the sergeant in charge of the squad room."

Hal, in the meantime, had returned to B Company. He found many of his comrades regarding him suspiciously, and flushed in consequence. But Corporal Cotter, Private Hyman and others stepped over to him.

"What's it all about, rookie? Do you know?" asked the corporal.

"Not a blessed thing, Corporal," replied the young recruit.

"Look! Here come the company commanders back," called another soldier, in a low tone.

"Sergeant Gray and the other sergeants of B Company will follow me to barracks," called Captain Cortland.

Now the curious soldiers saw each company

commander, followed by his sergeants, step back to barracks.

For an hour the puzzled men of the battalion waited on the parade ground.

Then, in some mysterious manner, the news of what had really happened began to spread.

In the night unknown men had broken into Major Silsbee's house. This had not been a difficult thing to do as, on a military post, doors are rarely locked. Not one of the three entrances to Major Silsbee's quarters had been locked at the time.

Downstairs the thieves had gathered a few articles together, but had not taken them, as they had found better plunder upstairs. From a dressing-room adjoining Mrs. Silsbee's sleeping apartment the prowlers had taken a jewel case containing jewels worth some three thousand dollars. There had also been about two hundred dollars in money in the case.

As the thieves were leaving the house they were seen by a sentry some sixty yards away. The sentry had challenged, then fired. The thieves had fled, swiftly, running directly away from all light. But another sentry had also seen them, and had fired. Both sentries had agreed that there were four men, and that they wore the uniforms of soldiers.

The thieves made good their escape. Soon

after the alarm was given forty men from A and D companies had been silently turned out to aid in establishing a stronger guard, and the barracks building had been watched through the rest of the night.

Yet no soldier had been caught trying to get back into barracks, nor had any man been missing at roll-call unless well accounted for.

"Somewhere in this battalion, then," murmured Noll to a man in C Company, "there are four soldiers who are thieves."

"Yes," replied the soldier bluntly, "and it looks as though your bunkie at the recruit rendezvous might know something about it."

"Hal Overton doesn't know," flared Noll promptly, "or he'd have told!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ANONYMOUS LETTER

IT was a four days' wonder, and then it dropped.

The search at barracks had revealed nothing. There was not a soldier on the post against whom any tangible suspicion pointed.

"There's just one way that a clue might be found," muttered Private Bill Hooper, one morning in Sergeant Hupner's squad room. "In time it may turn out that a sweetheart of some soldier gets some pretty jewelry trinkets given to her."

He glared covertly, though meaningly, at Hal Overton.

But Hal was far enough away neither to see nor to hear Hooper's fling.

"You'll never get caught on that trick, Bill," jeered Private Hyman. "No girl would look at you, even if you displayed the whole of the missing jewelry."

"I've had my share of sweethearts in my day," growled big Private Hooper.

"That was before your face changed for worse," grinned Hyman.

"Don't get gay with me," warned Hooper

sulkily, "or your face may suffer some changes!"

"Go over and thump the kid," proposed Hyman.

It was Hal who was meant by the term "kid."

"I don't like that youngster," muttered Hooper. "And I don't trust him, either."

"That'll never worry Hal Overton," smiled Hyman. "Hooper, you look so untidy that it's a wonder Sergeant Hupner doesn't 'call' you oftener for it. And you clean up your rifle about once a fortnight. Look at Overton over there."

Hal was at work with his kit of cleaning tools, going over his rifle as methodically and industriously as though it were a piece of rare silver plate.

"He'll rub and polish that old piece of his until he wears it out," mumbled Hooper.

"One of the surest signs of the good soldier is when you see him putting in a lot of his spare time caring for his uniforms and equipments," broke in Sergeant Hupner, behind them. "Hooper, go and brush your uniform, and clean your boots and polish 'em. I'll report you, if I see you so slouchy in the future."

Bill Hooper moved away, scowling.

Sergeant Gray strode in at that moment.

"Do you want leave to go to town to-day, re-

porting back at tattoo, Hyman?" inquired the first sergeant.

"Thank you, yes, Sergeant."

"All right; I'll turn you in on the list to Captain Cortland. I'll notify you of leave within half an hour."

Then he stepped over to Hal.

"Overton, you haven't had any leave to visit town since you joined. Would you like to take leave to-day?"

"No, Sergeant, thank you."

Sergeant Gray looked his surprise.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"I have too much to learn right here, Sergeant. I'm going to stick, and work, until I'm out of the recruit class."

"Good boy!" murmured Gray, in an undertone, and passed on. But Gray stopped when he came up with Hupner.

"Hupner, you've got a valuable man in Overton."

"I know it, Sergeant."

"Give him all the little points you can that will take him out of the recruit class promptly."

"Why, Sergeant," smiled Hupner, "Overton can go out of the recruit class at about any time now. Report him for the guard detail any time that you want. He'll make good. He's keen on every bit of his work. He can go

through his manual of arms like a juggler. He has studied his infantry drill regulations until he's about worn the book out; he knows his manual of guard duty by heart, and it would be mighty hard to trip him anywhere in his small arms firing manual. Have you noticed his facings and his marching at drill?"

"Yes," nodded Sergeant Gray thoughtfully. "The boy's a good one, all right."

"Take it from me, Sergeant—you needn't hesitate to detail the kid for guard or any other duty. He'll suit Captain Cortland."

"I'll detail him for guard, then, as soon as I can," returned Sergeant Gray. "That gives a young soldier confidence as soon as anything else ever does."

As often as is practicable enlisted men are given a day's leave, with permission to go off post and visit the nearest town. This leave is given to men known to be of good conduct. A "bad" soldier, when one is found, gets little in the way of leave.

Whenever a soldier or an ex-soldier is found slandering the Army service it is invariably safe to set him down as a man who, through very poor soldierly qualities, or actual viciousness, got "in the bad books" of his officers. There is every desire on the part of regimental and company officers to make it pleasant for a

truly good soldier, and to keep him in the service until he has reached retiring age.

The man who gets into bad company when away on leave is the soldier who has the most difficulty in getting leave another time.

On the other hand, the soldier of good conduct can have much leave during the month. It is a practice at many posts, when a man has a trade, and can get small jobs to do near the post, to allow him as many half days for that work as may be granted him without injury to the service. In this way handy men or mechanics among the soldiers often add many dollars to their pocket money.

As Private Bill Hooper went away to clean up his uniform and shoes, Hal blithely kept at work putting his rifle in A 1 order.

Both were interrupted, half an hour later, by the bugle call for separate company drill.

Private Overton was among the first on the drill ground. His clothing looked as though it had just come from the tailor's; his rifle had the appearance of being fresh from the arsenal.

"There's a man for you, Hyman," spoke Sergeant Hupner, in an undertone. "If the kid keeps on as he has started he'll be a winner."

"I've had my eye on him," nodded Private Hyman. "He seems to be good all the way through."

"Is he ever a little bit fresh in the squad room?" continued Sergeant Hupner.

"If the kid is," replied Hyman, "I've never happened to be around at that time. But he stands up for himself when he has to. I suppose you've heard, Sergeant, how he trimmed Bill Hooper off?"

"Yes," nodded Hupner; "that sort of thing won't hurt Hooper at all, either."

"Hooper may lay for a chance to accuse Overton of something in the squad room that the kid didn't do."

"I'll have my eyes open for Hooper," replied Hupner dryly. "I haven't anything against any of the other sergeants in this battalion, but I really wish some other sergeant had Hooper in his squad room."

"B Company fall in," sounded the voice of Captain Cortland.

First Lieutenant Hampton and the sergeants hastened to their posts, while the corporals and privates went to their places in the ranks.

The command for open order was given, after which Captain Cortland commanded:

"Inspect the second platoon, Lieutenant Hampton."

With that the company commander himself passed behind the backs of the men of the first platoon, looking each man over keenly.

"Private Hooper, fall out!" ordered Captain Cortland sharply.

When the captain had finished his own work, and Lieutenant Hampton had reported all men in the second platoon to be soldierly in appearance, Captain Cortland turned to Bill Hooper with a look of disapproval.

"Private Hooper, this is the third time within a month that you've failed to report in neat and soldierly appearance. Who is in charge of your squad room?"

"Sergeant Hupner, sir."

"Sergeant Hupner," resumed the captain, "what have you to say to this man's appearance?"

"I ordered him, at least a half an hour ago, sir, to clean himself up."

"Keep right after Private Hooper, Sergeant. If he fails again to keep himself as a soldier should, report him to the first sergeant."

Hooper's face burned darkly. Even honest Sergeant Hupner flushed. A shiftless soldier is a sore trial to the sergeant responsible for him.

Now, at the brisk command, B Company moved off in column of fours. A long practice march followed. While out, the company was halted and drilled searchingly. It was a hard morning's work, B Company returning just in

time for dinner. In the afternoon there was another drill. Parade wound up the day.

On his return from parade Lieutenant Wright, the adjutant, found in his office mail a letter that caused him a good deal of astonishment.

"Watch Private Overton, B. Company, if you want to find a man who knows a lot about the robbery the other night. He has been acting suspiciously, and I have it from a man in his squad room that Overton sometimes talks in his sleep in a way to show that either he was one of the robbers, or else that he knows who they are.

"A FRIEND."

CHAPTER XIX

A SECRET COWARD

IF any official notice was taken of that lying anonymous note the rascally writer thereof did not have the satisfaction of discovering it for some time to come.

Duties in the battalion went on, as usual, at Fort Clowdry, the next day.

Late in the afternoon, however, came a brief battalion drill, followed by the glorious spectacle of dress parade.

After the regimental band had played the colors down the line, and the other ceremonies had been observed, Adjutant Wright took his post to publish the orders.

These were few, and the reading did not occupy long. As the officer returned the papers to the breast of his coat the men expected to see him step back. Instead, however, the adjutant sharply called:

“Battalion, attention! I am directed by the battalion commander to make an inquiry. Each man will pay close heed, and answer if he is able. Has any non-commissioned officer or private in this battalion heard, at any time lately, any man in the same squad room with him talk in his

sleep in such a way as to indicate that the man talking in his sleep had any knowledge concerning the men who recently broke into and robbed the battalion commander's quarters? Any man having such knowledge will fall out."

There was a tense silence, but the ranks of the first battalion remained intact.

"If there is any non-commissioned officer or private who did not fully understand my question, he will fall out," continued the adjutant.

Still no man fell out.

"If the man who addressed the anonymous letter to the battalion adjutant is present he will step out," continued Lieutenant Wright.

Still the ranks remained unbroken.

Being at "attention," each man in the four companies was looking fixedly ahead. But curiosity was running wild under all those blue fatigue blouses!

"An anonymous letter has been received at battalion headquarters," continued the adjutant sternly. "This letter accuses a soldier, who is named, of having guilty knowledge concerning the perpetrators of the robbery of the other night. The writer of this letter asserts that other men in the squad room have heard the anonymously accused soldier talking in his sleep

in such a manner as to implicate the accused in the robbery.

“No man present has acknowledged having heard such talk. Either some soldiers now in ranks have lied in denying having heard such talk, or else the writer of the anonymous letter is a liar. I am directed by the battalion commander to state his belief that the writer of the anonymous letter is the liar.

“The writer of the letter has been ordered to fall out and reveal himself. If that writer is present, then he knows in his own mind, and one of these days his comrades will know, that he is too much of a coward to face responsibility for his sneaking action.

“The man who writes an anonymous letter is always a coward, a sneak, and usually a liar, too. I am directed by the battalion commander to state that, if the writer of this anonymous letter can be found, he will be placed on trial for his act, which is one unworthy of a soldier.

“I am further directed by the battalion commander to state that no letter anonymously accusing an enlisted man will react in any way against the accused. The battalion commander feels that he cannot state, too strongly, his intense contempt for any coward who will resort to slandering a comrade in an anonymous letter.

“The battalion commander will be glad, at any time, to receive from any man in his command any information or report that may be made honestly and for the good of the service. But the man making such report will go to headquarters and make it in person, or else will put his information in writing and sign it fully and manfully.”

After an impressive pause Adjutant Wright stepped back, saluted his commanding officer, then stepped to his proper position.

At a signal from the adjutant the buglers now sounded retreat. As the last notes died out the sunset gun was fired. Rifles flew to “present arms,” swords flashed to salute and male civilian onlookers uncovered their heads while the band crashed out with “The Star Spangled Banner.”

As the band played, the Flag fluttered down from the peak of the post flag staff and descended into the hands of its defenders. One man stood in the ranks at that moment who was unfit to touch even the border of that national emblem.

“Order arms!” rang out, as the last note died out. “Right shoulder arms!”

Then by column of fours the battalion marched briskly off the field, to be halted and dismissed near barracks.

No sooner were the men in their quarters than the same angry inquiry rose in each squad room:

“Who has been writing lying letters about a comrade?”

No one admitted being the dastard, of course, yet over at headquarters Major Silsbee, at that very moment, was asking:

“What makes you so very sure, Wright, that some man in this command wrote the anonymous letter?”

“It is all very simple, sir,” replied the adjutant. “Look at the note again, sir, and you’ll see that it is typewritten——”

“Of course, Wright; I’ve known that from the first.”

“But, sir, it’s written in the style of type that is used on the Everite typewriter. This post is equipped with Everite typewriters; we have them here at headquarters, and every first sergeant has one, too, for his clerk.”

“And there may be a dozen more Everite typewriters over in Clowdry,” suggested Major Silsbee dubiously.

“No, Major; I’ve made an investigation. I have a list of every firm or person in Clowdry who owns a machine—only about a dozen in all, and not one of them is an Everite. Major, the letter was written on this post, and with an Everite machine.”

"Then, by the great guns, sir, I hope you go further and catch the culprit," exploded Major Silsbee, bringing his fist down on the desk.

"Ah," sighed Lieutenant Wright. "That's just where the trouble is. It will be a hard task, sir."

CHAPTER XX

THE LUCK OF THE YOUNG RECRUIT

ON top of all this came the news that Colonel North's quarters had been entered the night following.

Worse, the scoundrels had used chloroform this time. Colonel North awoke at about three in the morning, his head feeling heavy and dull. He noted at once the strange odor in the room. Then he roused his family. Traces of thieves were found; within ten seconds after that Colonel North had summoned the guard.

Yet the two sentries on duty in officers' row both declared that they had seen no prowlers.

Almost every article of value had been found and taken. A pair of costly revolvers belonging to the regimental commander had gone with the loot. Some money, too, had been found and taken. Colonel North and his family placed their loss at nearly four thousand dollars.

"Lieutenant Ray," said Colonel North, to the officer of the day, who had followed the guard, "I think you had better summon Major Silsbee at once."

The major was there, inside of five minutes.

"So the scoundrels have blistered you, too,

sir?" demanded the white-faced battalion commander wrathfully.

"They have taken almost everything in the way of valuable property that Mrs. North and I own, Major."

"We've got to put a stop to this, sir. And we've got to find and bring the rascals to boot."

"Pardon me, Colonel; shall I pass the order for a prompt search of barracks?" queried the officer of the day.

"No, Mr. Ray," replied Colonel North promptly. "Until I have real proof I'm not going to put the slight upon our enlisted men. I believe they're all fine men. If I had taken more time to think I never would have sanctioned the last search of barracks. It shan't happen again."

Captain Ruggles of A Company, having heard some excitement along the row, now came in.

"What we might, and perhaps ought to do, Major," continued the Colonel, "is to advise the married officers whose homes have not yet been robbed that they will do well to send their valuables into town for safe-keeping at the bank for the present."

"We might, sir," assented Silsbee dryly. "The bank in Clowdry is under the protection of a police force of less than a dozen men. Shall we admit, Colonel, that a dozen policemen

are safer guardians of property than our four hundred men of the Regular Army?"

Colonel North looked troubled at that way of putting the matter.

"I believe Mrs. Ruggles and I have some things worth stealing," broke in Captain Ruggles quietly. "But I feel certain that neither of us would like to throw any slight over the ability of this battalion to protect its own property."

"My head isn't very clear yet," admitted Colonel North. "I realize that I have made a poor suggestion. I don't imagine, Major, that you'd be much better pleased if I directed you to double the guard."

"I shall obey, of course, Colonel, any orders on that subject that you may give me," replied Major Silsbee.

"These robberies are likely to continue, at intervals, until the quarters of all married officers have been entered and despoiled, sir," suggested Captain Ruggles, "so it seems to me, sir, that it would be wise to put each guard on its mettle."

"I am thinking only of protecting you gentlemen who have not yet sustained losses," continued Colonel North.

"And we appreciate your solicitude greatly, sir," resumed Major Silsbee.

"I leave it to you, Major."

"Then I shall make it my business, sir, to see to it that the men are instructed to be more alert than ever in guard duty," replied Silsbee.

The next morning the news, of course, traveled swiftly all through the garrison.

Hal and Noll had a chance to chat together for a few minutes before the sounding of the first assembly after breakfast.

"The thieves are around again," mused Noll aloud.

"Yes," nodded Private Hal thoughtfully.

"I wish we might catch the rascals at it."

"You've got time enough to think out your plan, then," laughed Hal, in mild derision at this suggestion.

"How so?"

"Well, the thieves are not due for a few days yet on their next raid. It seems to be their plan to leave intervals between their raids."

"If the burglars are scheming further attempts they may vary their plans by coming again to-night," hinted Noll.

"I hardly believe they will," replied Hal, shaking his head.

That day at noon Sergeant Gray warned Hal for guard the following day. Just after dinner Hal found that his chum Noll had also been warned.

"If the thieves are coming again I hope it will be to-morrow night," suggested Hal.

"No good," retorted Noll cynically.

"Why not?"

"We're only rooks."

"Well?"

"There isn't a ghost of a chance that we'd be put on post up in officers' row. The oldest and keenest soldiers will be put on that duty every night."

"Oh, I suppose so," sighed Hal. "Of course rookies are just rooks. We'll get the post down by the commissary stores, where a wagon train would be needed for stealing anything really worth money."

At guard mount the next morning both recruits turned out spick and span. Knowing that they could not expect to get any important posts for night tours both boys hoped to be selected by the officer of the day for orderly duty. But two older soldiers were chosen for that. When guard mount was over Sergeant Hupner, as commander of the guard, marched the new guard over to the guard-house, where the old guard was relieved.

This was the first time that the rookies had been detailed to guard duty since joining their regiment. No matter to what inconsequential posts they might be assigned both were full of

determination to show themselves model sentries.

During the day Hal and Noll, who were assigned to the same relief, had two tours. The first was in officers' row; the second, which ended just before dark, was down at the main entrance of the post.

Then followed some hours for leisure and sleep.

"You men will go on post again at two in the morning," announced Corporal Sanders, who was in command of the relief to which the rookies belonged.

Punctually that relief was turned out, aligned, inspected and instructed.

"Post number three, Private Overton. Post number four, Private Terry," ran the corporal's orders. "Post number five——"

And so on.

Hal's heart was already beating high with hope. He had the post along officers' row, Noll the one just beyond.

"All sentries will exercise unusual vigilance," announced Sergeant Hupner, as commander of the guard. "This applies especially to the sentries on posts number three and four. But let no sentry, anywhere, allow his whole attention to wander from his duties for an instant. Corporal, march the relief."

"Attention," called Corporal Sanders on receiving this order. "Right shoulder arms! By twos, left march!"

Three minutes later the man on post three had been relieved, Hal having been dropped into his place.

It was just after two o'clock in the morning when Private Hal Overton began to pace his post, watching the relief vanish in the darkness in the direction of post number four.

Then he heard a sentry's hail:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"The relief."

"Advance, relief."

After that, the steps of the marching party died off in the distance.

In the darkest part of the moonless night Hal walked up and down before the officers' quarters.

But he did more than walk. Making his own steps as noiseless as possible Hal felt that he was truly "all ears and eyes."

Thus some twenty minutes went by.

Then, suddenly, just as Hal had passed the north side of Captain Ruggles' quarters the young sentry halted like a flash.

Under the dim starlight he saw two shadowy forms leave by the captain's back door.

Each carried a bundle, though Hal could not

make out the size or shape of either very distinctly.

"The burglars—at their tricks!" flashed Hal exultantly.

But he wasted no time thinking. In a twinkling he slipped a cartridge into his rifle, bringing the piece to his shoulder.

"Halt!" he challenged. "Who's there?"

The two figures, crouching low, made a bolt for the tall corn in a vegetable garden at the rear of the grounds.

"As fast as he could shout the words Private Hal Overton shouted:

"Halt! Who's there? Halt! Who's there?"

Having obeyed a sentry's instructions to challenge three times, and receiving no answer, Hal pressed the trigger.

A flash of flame lit the darkness around the rifle. It leaped straight from the muzzle.

Bang! The bullet sped in among the corn stalks.

Over it all sounded Hal's voice:

"Corporal of the guard, post number three!"

Hal shot back the bolt of his rifle, dropping in a cartridge with fingers as steady as at drill.

"Corporal of the guard, post number three!"

The gate was too far away. Hal took the fence at a bound, carrying his cocked piece with him.

Straight to the growing corn the young private took his speedy way.

"Come out and show yourselves, or I fire at once," Private Overton shouted.

Crack! crack! Two pistol shots rang out from the corn patch.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DUEL IN THE DARK

ALL this had occupied but a few seconds. Private Hal Overton was on duty, and bent on business.

"I'll get one, or both of the rascals—dead or alive!" flashed through his mind.

Not even those two pistol shots brought him to a halt.

Yet one of the bullets struck the ground beside him as he raced, the other fanning his left cheek with a little breeze.

"Get back there, bo!" growled a gruff voice. "You don't want to be killed, do you?"

For answer Hal sighted swiftly and fired.

Then, for an instant, he dropped to one knee.

From out of the corn patch a curse reached his ears.

"If you'd rather be a dead soldier, all right," came the ugly response. "Give it to him good and hot!"

Hal had already slipped back the bolt of his piece. Now, as fast as he could handle the material, and while still down on one knee, he slipped five cartridges into his magazine, and a sixth he drove home in the chamber.

Bright flashes, swift reports greeted him from two points in the corn patch. These points were about twenty feet apart.

The young soldier simply couldn't cover both points of attack.

From the way the bullets whistled past his face and body the recruit knew that both his enemies were firing in deadly earnest.

And now, from a third point, another assailant joined in the firing, and Hal marveled, with each second, that he still remained alive. He felt as though he were the center of a leaden storm.

Yet, as coolly as he could, Soldier Hal chose the man at the left and drove two shots straight in the direction of the flashes.

"He's got me," yelled a cursing voice.

"I'll get you all, if you don't stop shooting and come out," warned Overton coolly.

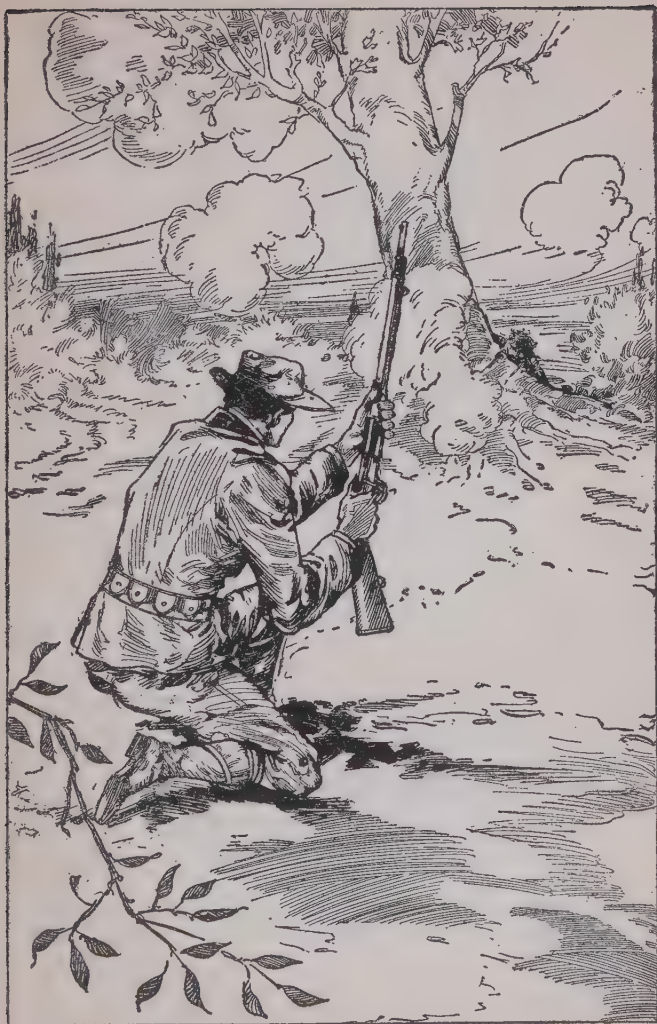
He could hear the wounded man moving rather swiftly through the corn.

"He ought to leave a trail of blood," thought Hal, swiftly, and turned his attention to the next enemy.

But that man had stopped his firing.

Then Hal turned his rifle in the direction of the flashes from the pistol farthest away.

Bang! He sent one shot there, and the shooting of the unknown stopped.



Hal Dropped to One Knee.

Private Overton, however, could not know whether he had hit the fellow.

"That fellow in the middle may be left yet," breathed Hal Overton, "I'll find out."

He had three shots yet left in his magazine, and his piece was at cock.

Rising, he made swiftly for the corn, and dived in.

"Back for your life!" sounded a voice straight ahead.

Crack! crack!

Two pistols shots fanned his face.

But Hal took another running bound forward, preferring to reserve his fire until he could catch a good glimpse of the fellow's body.

"Back, you fool!" hissed the voice, followed by two more shots.

"Come out with your hands up, or I'll get you!" Hal retorted.

Instead, the unknown and unseen turned and ran some fifty feet.

Hal pursued, without shooting.

Crack! crack!

For an instant Hal felt almost dizzy with sudden dread, for those flashes seemed almost to smite him in the face.

Yes, he was afraid, for a brief space. The coward is not the man who is afraid, but the man who allows his fear to overmaster him.

"Fire again," yelled Hal, "and I'll know just where to send a bullet."

As he rushed onward he came out of the corn patch.

Fifty feet further on he saw the fugitive, just dropping to the ground at the roots of a tree.

Crack! crack! crack!

Lying on the ground, his head hardly showing beyond the roots, the fugitive was now in excellent position to stop the young sentry's rush.

Whizz—zz! whizz—zz! Click!

Two of the speeding bullets flew past Hal's head. The third struck and glanced off the rifle butt just as Hal, dropping to one knee, was raising the piece to his shoulder to sight.

Bang! That was Hal's rifle, again in action. He had aimed swiftly, but deliberately, for the base of the tree.

Against the military rifle of to-day an ordinary tree offers no protection. The American Army rifle, at short range, will send a bullet through three feet of green oak.

"Wow!" yelled the other. Though Hal did not then know it, the bullet had driven a handful of dirt into the fellow's mouth.

Hal could hear the rascal spitting, so he called:

"Come and out and surrender, and I won't fire again "

"You go to blazes!" yelled an angry voice.

Muffled as the voice was, it had a strangely familiar sound to the young soldier.

Hal seized the chance to fill his magazine as he shot the bolt back. He slipped another cartridge into the chamber.

From the sounds beyond he knew that his enemy was also reloading.

"Any time you want me to stop shooting," Hal coolly announced, "just call out that you surrender."

Then he brought his piece to his shoulder.

Bang!

He could hear the bullet strike with a thud.

Had there been light Hal could have scored a hit, but all shooting in the dark is mainly guess-work.

Crack! crack! The fugitive's pistol was also in action.

One of the bullets carried the young soldier's sombrero from his head, but he was barely aware of the fact. Yet, had that bullet been aimed two inches lower, it would have found a resting place in his brain.

Bang!

Hal fired his second shot with deliberation.

"Stop that!" wailed the other, with a new note of fear in his voice.

"Surrender!"

Crack! crack!

Two pistol shots made up the reply.

"I'm afraid I've got to kill him, if he doesn't get me first."

Bang!

"Ow—ow—ow—ow!" That yell was genuine enough to show that the young sentry's bullet had struck flesh.

"Do you surrender?"

"Not to you!"

Hal fired again. Then he crouched low, slipping two more cartridges into his rifle.

Crack! crack!

"I'll get you yet," called a furious voice.

Hal started as though he had been shot, though he was not aware of a hit.

"Tip Branders!" he called, in astonishment, and fired again.

"Yes, it's me," came the admission. "Hal Overton, are you going to kill an old friend?"

CHAPTER XXII

CAPTAIN CORTLAND HEADS THE PURSUIT

A WAY over by post number four Hal heard three rifle shots ring out.

But he paid no heed. Instead he answered the now terrorized wretch in front of him:

“I’ll have to kill you, unless you surrender!”

“Then I’ll get you first,” came the defiant answer.

From the flashes, it could now be seen that Tip Branders was firing with a revolver in each hand.

The bullets came in so swift and close that Private Hal Overton expected, every instant, to be bowled over.

But still he fired deliberately, though he now strove to make each shot effective.

In a few moments he fired next to the last cartridge in his magazine, just as the furious revolver fusillade came to an end.

“O-o-oh!”

Then the young sentry felt, rather than saw, something topple over at the base of the tree.

Hal leaped up, at the same instant hearing some one run up behind him.

That brought the young sentry about like a flash.

"I'm Captain Ruggles, Sentry!" came the prompt hail, and Private Overton recognized the voice.

Then Hal wheeled the other way, rushing toward the tree, calling back as he ran:

"I think I got the scoundrel, sir."

In another moment Hal was beside the tree, holding his rifle clubbed and ready, in case Tip Branders was playing 'possum.

But the fellow lay on the ground, curiously huddled up, not moving a hand.

"I got him with that last shot, sir," announced Private Overton, turning and carefully saluting his officer.

"You've had a brisk and brave fight, Sentry," cried Captain Ruggles warmly. "I heard your first shot, and rushed here as fast as I could come."

In reality, long as the time had seemed, hardly more than a full minute had passed. Captain Ruggles, with a pair of white-striped trousers drawn on over his pajamas, and slippers on his feet, presented a picture of speed.

Hal bent beside his old enemy of the home town to see where Tip had been hit.

Captain Ruggles, changing his revolver to his left hand, drew a match and struck it.

Tip's first apparent wound was a graze at the top of his right shoulder. A dark, red stain appeared there. Another bullet had grazed his right wrist.

The third wound apparent was at the right side of the chest.

"It'll need a rain-maker (Army surgeon) to tell whether that bullet touched the scoundrel's right lung," declared Captain Ruggles.

At that instant a woman's voice sounded from one of the windows of the house behind them:

"Corporal of the guard, you'll find Captain Ruggles and the sentry somewhere back of the garden."

Then came the sounds of running feet. Corporal Sanders was coming with the guard.

That incident showed the young soldier, more clearly than anything else could have done, how brief the duel between Tip and himself had been.

For Hal knew that, when the alarm is sounded, accompanied by the sound of a shot, the corporal and the guard come on the dead run.

"Right here, Corporal of the guard!" shouted Captain Ruggles, standing up. "Send one man back immediately for hospital men and a stretcher."

"Hospital men and a stretcher, Davidson," called the corporal, and one soldier detached

himself from the running squad, wheeling and racing back.

Then the corporal of the guard dashed up at the head of his men, giving Captain Ruggles the rifle salute by bringing his left hand smartly against the barrel of his piece.

Barely behind the guard came Lieutenant Hayes, of A Company, who was officer of the day.

"The sentry has caught one of the burglars, Hayes," called Captain Ruggles, as the lieutenant came up on the run.

"Glad of it, sir. It's about time."

Then, turning to Hal, Lieutenant Hayes continued:

"You're sentry on number three, Private Overton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Make your report in as few words as you can."

This Hal did, telling about the two men whom he saw sneaking away with bundles, and also about the third man who had joined in firing at him.

"Which way did the other two retreat, Private Overton?"

"I couldn't see, sir," the young soldier answered. "I was in the corn at that moment."

The corporal of the guard, in the meantime,

had sent another man to relieve Noll Terry on post number four, directing Terry to report to the officer of the day.

Still another member of the guard had been placed on post number three.

All the other commissioned officers on post, including Colonel North, now appeared, and the investigating party was adjourned to the roadway.

Noll reported that he had seen two fugitives at a distance, and had fired three times.

Under military discipline matters move rapidly. Soldiers with lanterns were now searching for the trail of those who had escaped. Keen eyes were also seeking either bundle of loot from Captain Ruggles's quarters. It was thought that the thieves, in their haste to get away, might have dropped their plunder.

Tip Branders, still unconscious, and badly hurt, according to the surgeon, was taken to the post hospital, and the civil authorities in Clowdry were notified.

"That fellow you shot called you by name, didn't he, Overton?" inquired Captain Ruggles.

"Yes, sir," Hal admitted.

"Ah, you knew the fellow, then?" inquired Colonel North. He spoke blandly, but he had an instant recollection of the anonymous note

that had been received at battalion headquarters.

"Yes, sir," Hal spoke promptly. "The fellow is Tip Branders. He comes from the same home town that I do. He tried to enlist in the Army, but was rejected because he could not supply good enough references. Then he ran away from home, taking with him some money he stole from his mother, according to local accounts."

"Did you know the fellow Branders was in this part of the world?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why, Private Overton, did you not report your information promptly to your officers?"

"Why, I did not have the least idea, sir, that Branders was still in this neighborhood, and I did not, at any time, connect him in my mind with the robberies."

"How often, and where, have you seen Branders in this part of the country?" demanded Colonel North, impressively, while the other officers looked on with keen interest.

Hal flushed, for he felt that now he was under some suspicion himself.

"I have seen Branders just once, sir," the recruit replied. "Private Terry was with me at the time."

"This man here?" inquired Colonel North, turning to glance at Noll, who stood by.

"Yes, sir."

"When did you both see Branders, then?"

"Our first day here, sir. You may recall, Colonel, that you told Terry and me that we need not go on duty that first day, but that we might have the day to ourselves, as a reward for having helped Major Davis in that mail-train affair the night before our arrival at this post."

"I remember," nodded Colonel North. "But you have not yet told me the circumstances of your meeting with Branders."

Hal hurriedly recounted the details of that meeting, among the rocks past the ledge, out on the road leading westward from the post.

"At that time, Colonel," Private Hal Overton continued, "Branders told us he was headed for a ranch to the westward, where he expected to get a job. We had no reason for disbelieving him, at the time, and so it never even occurred to us, until to-night, that he might be one of the burglars who have been looting this post. Besides, sir, though Tip had always been known as a rather worthless fellow, we had never heard of his being the associate of downright criminals."

Now the searchers came in to report that they

could find neither a trail nor any sight of dropped bundles of loot.

"At daylight, Major," suggested Colonel North to Major Silsbee, "you may be able to send out scouts who, with a better light, may succeed in finding a trail."

Hal turned to Lieutenant Hayes, saluting.

"I wonder, sir, if it won't be best for me to offer a suggestion to Colonel North?"

The regimental commander turned at once.

"You may speak, Private Overton."

"I was about to inquire, sir," replied Hal, saluting, "if it isn't likely that there may be a good hiding place for thieves among the rocks back of the ledge of which I spoke some time ago."

"What makes you think the thieves may be there, Overton?"

"The thought has just struck me, sir, that Branders was probably lurking about in the vicinity of a cave or other place of concealment, on the day that he threw the stone at us. It struck me, sir, that a squad of men might search that locality with the chance of finding the rest of Branders's associates and also of recovering much of the stuff that has been stolen from quarters on this post."

"That's a bright suggestion, worth working upon. Cortland, will you take a detachment of

men and hasten out to that locality? Post men all around while it is still dark, and then, with a few men, plunge right through that neighborhood. Overton and Terry will go with you as guides, so that you may strike the exact spot without loss of time."

Captain Cortland dispatched a soldier to go at once to Sergeant Hupner's squad room, with orders to turn out the men in that room at once and under arms, with fifty rounds of ammunition per man.

This done, Captain Cortland hastened to his own quarters, soon returning with his sword hanging at his belt and his revolver in its holster.

"While you are gone, Cortland," said Colonel North, "Silsbee and I will make whatever other investigations we can think of."

In an almost incredibly short space of time Sergeant Hupner's squad was ready, and turned into officers' row.

"Overton and Terry, you will walk ahead of the detachment, and I will go with you," Captain Cortland announced. "Sergeant Hupner, march your detachment in column of twos, twenty paces to the rear of the guides. Forward!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE STIRRING GAME AT DAWN

"**T**HERE is the ledge, sir, right in yonder," announced Hal, peering through the darkness. A wind was coming up and the stars had faded. It was in the darkest hour before dawn.

Captain Cortland stepped back, holding out one hand as a signal.

Sergeant Hupner saw, and halted his detachment, marching almost without a sound.

"Remain here, guides, with the detachment," directed the company commander, in a whisper. "Sergeant Hupner, you and I will go forward and reconnoitre."

As soon as the officer and the non-commissioned officer had departed Private Bill Hooper growled out:

"What kind of a fool chase is this you've got us into, Overton?"

"Silence in the ranks," hissed Corporal Cotter sharply. "Not a word!"

Fifteen minutes later Captain Cortland and the sergeant returned.

"Take twelve of the men, now, Sergeant. You know where to post them," directed Cap-

tain Cortland briskly. "As soon as you have done so return to me."

Hupner marched off in the darkness with his dozen men. In a few minutes he was back.

"We'll wait until daylight now for the rest of our work," announced the company commander.

Slowly enough the time passed. No word was spoken. All was as still around the little military force as though they had been isolated in the center of a vast desert.

Then the first faint signs of dawn came. Some of the soldiers were seated on the ground, gaping and with difficulty refraining from going to sleep, for these men of Uncle Sam's Army had been routed from their beds in the middle of the night.

The morning light increased, though it was still dim, and the first vague shapes near the ledge began to take more definite shape.

"We won't need to wait more than five minutes more, Sergeant Hupner," declared the captain.

Cortland stood holding his watch close to his face. As soon as he could read the time he turned to whisper:

"Now, Overton, lead us up to the exact spot from which you had your interview with the fellow Branders."

"Shall the men load, sir?" whispered Sergeant Hupner.

"Yes; full magazines."

As silently as possible the men of the little searching party slipped back the bolts of their pieces and loaded.

"Go ahead, Overton," whispered Captain Cortland.

Just behind Soldier Hal stepped the company commander himself, watching every footstep in order not to step on any loose stone that might sound a premature alarm.

Yet one man among them slipped and made a noise. It was trifling, but almost instantly a whistle sounded ahead.

Without even thinking to wait for orders Hal returned the whistle.

"That you, Tip?" called the voice of an invisible man. "Good for you, lad. We thought you was a goner."

Hal did not answer further, for Captain Cortland broke in:

"Rush 'em, men! We've got 'em."

"Ho! The blazes you have!" sounded a rough voice ahead. "Come on, boys—it's the sojers! Give it to 'em!"

Almost in an instant the crevices between the rocks ahead were full of red flashes.

Bullets sped, struck rocks with spiteful thuds

and flattened out before bounding into the air again.

“Lie down, men!” shouted Captain Cortland. “Give it to the rascals as long as they shoot at us.”

All in a moment this rock-strewn spot had become a bedlam of discharging firearms.

Two regulars were hit before they could find cover from which to fire. These men, however, made no outcry, but, finding themselves unable to handle their rifles, lay quietly where they had fallen until the time came for them to have attention.

Though he had sharply ordered his men to lie down, Captain Cortland did nothing of the sort himself. Instead, with his revolver drawn, he stood up, peering ahead and trying to get sight of the scoundrels beyond.

Bullets flew all about the captain, many of them passing his head. But he stood there calmly until he caught just the opportunity for which he had waited.

Then his pistol spoke, and a groan beyond showed that he had been a successful marksman.

“Squad, rise!” shot out the commander’s order. “Charge!”

Crouching low, the soldiers sprang suddenly forward.

"Halt! Lie down," continued Cortland. He had gained sixty feet by his rush without loss of a man. "Fire only when you see something to shoot at. Commence firing at will."

Now the firing slackened, though it was not less deadly. Even the scoundrels ahead slowed down their fire, as though they found their weapons becoming hot.

Captain Cortland was in no hurry. He meant to have the scoundrels, dead or alive, but he did not intend to risk his own men needlessly. The army officer knew it was now only a question of time. Nor did he fear running out of ammunition, for the greater part of his small command was not yet in action, but posted beyond.

The daylight grew stronger; then the upper rim of the sun peeped over the horizon, sending its rays into the sky.

"Cease firing," commanded Cortland at last. Then he called over the rocks.

"Are you fellows ready to surrender to United States forces?"

"Not until we're all dead," came the taunting reply.

"Then we'll try to accommodate you by killing you with as little delay as possible," called back the captain. Then, to his own little force he added:

"Men, advance as you see opportunity. Fire whenever you see anything to aim at."

Steadily the regulars crawled forward, a foot or a yard at a time.

As they moved they tried, Indian fashion, to find new cover behind rocks over which they could aim and fire.

Hal and Noll, not ten feet apart, occasionally glanced at each other after firing.

Both young rookies were thoroughly enjoying this actual taste of fighting life.

It was not many minutes before the advancing handful of soldiers were within seventy or eighty feet of the rocks that sheltered the rascals.

Then suddenly they saw three crouching figures begin to retreat among the rocks.

With a cheer the attacking force went forward, crouching.

But just then three rifles from out beyond spoke, and bullets whistled past the scoundrels from a new quarter.

"Great smoke, boys!" bellowed one of the fugitives hoarsely. "The sojers have us hemmed in on all sides."

"Yes, we have," shouted Captain Cortland. "Do you want to surrender?"

"Make your men stop shooting or moving, and give us two minutes to think."

"We'll keep on advancing and firing until we have your surrender," retorted Captain Cortland grimly. "Whenever you want to surrender tell me so and raise your hands high in the air."

"Wait a min——"

"Keep on firing, men," called Captain Cortland.

"Hold on! We give in, Cap."

"Cease firing, men," called the commander of B Company. "Now you fellows jump up and show yourselves with your hands reaching for the sky."

Three rough-looking figures clambered up on rocks, holding their empty hands as high as they could get them. One of them had his neck bound, and there was blood on his clothing. This was the first man whom Hal had wounded back of Captain Ruggles's quarters at the beginning of the fray.

"Stand just that way until we reach you," ordered the army officer. "Close in on them, men, and fire if you see one of them reach for a weapon."

But the trio plainly had no further intentions in the way of fighting. They waited, sullen-faced and silent, until the soldiers had reached them and had taken away their weapons."

"You have handcuffs, Sergeant?" inquired the captain.

Hupner and Corporal Cotter both produced the steel bracelets. The three rogues were swiftly handcuffed.

"You'll find our boss over yonder," nodded one of the men. "He's bad hit, too."

They found the fellow, nearly unconscious, but groaning, his right shoulder badly shattered by the bullet from Captain Cortland's revolver.

"Sergeant," directed B Company's commander, "send a messenger back to the post for hospital men and an ambulance. You can report that two of our own men have been hit."

The leader of the scoundrels was lifted and carried back where the two men of B Company lay. Captain Cortland directed such aid as could be given on the spot to all of the wounded men.

"Shall I call in the men I posted, sir?" inquired Hupner.

"Not yet, Sergeant. There may be others of this gang hidden somewhere among the rocks. But you may take three men and search for others."

Within ten minutes the search had been made thoroughly. No more of the evil band had been found.

"We'll go back just as soon as the ambulance arrives and the wounded have been taken care of," announced Captain Cortland.

Hal, at that moment, had his eye on one of the prisoners. He saw a gleam of satisfaction show in the fellow's eyes.

"May I speak, sir?" asked Private Overton, saluting Captain Cortland.

"Yes," nodded the officer.

"May some of us remain behind them, sir, to search all this ground over?"

"For what, Overton?"

"It doesn't seem likely, sir, that these scoundrels have been living in the open air. And they must have some place for concealing their booty."

"Quite right, Overton. Corporal Cotter, take Overton, Terry and two other men and make a thorough search of the rocks and ground hereabouts."

Hal turned swiftly to the man in whose eyes he had seen that gleam of satisfaction the moment before. Now the fellow was scowling.

"That was a hit," Hal murmured to himself. "The rascals have some hiding place around here."

"Now we'll divide the ground up in small squares," announced Corporal Cotter as he led his picked men away. "We'll search each

square minutely, so that no little patch may be overlooked."

"Won't it be best, Corporal," hinted Hal, "to start where the thieves were when the fighting began?"

"Just the ticket, Overton," nodded the corporal.

So the search began at that point. Nor did it last long, for Hal, thrusting with the butt of his rifle, poked a large bush partly aside exclaiming:

"I guess you'd better come here, Corporal," the recruit called.

As Cotter came running to the spot Private Overton displayed a hole rising some three feet above the grounds. It had been covered by the foliage of the bush.

"Looks like the mouth of a cave, doesn't it?" Hal asked, with gleaming eyes.

"A whole lot," agreed Corporal Cotter, producing a pocket electric flashlight. "You can follow me in, Overton, if you like."

Corporal and private crawled into the hole. They did not have to go more than six feet before they stood in a stone-walled chamber of considerable size. Roughly, it appeared to be an apartment of about twenty by thirty-five feet.

"Beds, tables, chairs, lamps, grub," enu-

merated Corporal Cotter, looking about him gleefully. "Take the lamp, Overton. I'm going back to call the captain."

Less than two minutes later Captain Cortland stood in the rockbound chamber.

"Well, this is a place!" whistled the officer in surprise.

"This chest is locked, sir," reported Hal, who had been improving his time by looking about. "Do you think it may contain loot, Captain?"

"There's an ax," nodded Cortland, glancing around him. "Corporal, just try the ax on the chest—carefully."

With a few blows Cotter had the chest open. Captain Cortland knelt by the wooden chest to inspect.

"This is clothing on top," he announced. "But—ah, what does this look like?"

In the middle of the chest's contents he had come upon carefully wrapped packages of jewelry, watches and the like.

"We won't go any further just now," declared the captain. "But we'll take back this chest with us."

On the return to Fort Clowdry the prisoners, though captured on the military reservation, were turned over to the civil officers. Even Tip Branders and the wounded chief of the

band were taken to Clowdry for care by the town authorities.

The chest was found to have contained all the stolen jewelry. The money that had been taken on the same raids, however, was not found. Plainly the thieves had used the money for the needs of the moment.

Hal and Noll, on their return, reported promptly to the commander of the guard, for they still belonged to the guard detail.

"Queer, ain't it?" asked Private Bill Hooper that morning in Hupner's squad room as the men were washing up before morning mess call.

"What is?" demanded Private Hyman.

"Why, that kid, Overton, knew one of the gang—one, at least—all the time. Yet Overton shot his old-time friend. And Overton knew all along where the bunch was hiding. And did you hear how neatly he led Corporal Cotter right to the cave of the gang? Now if that don't prove——"

Hyman promptly knocked Hooper down.

"It proves, Bill," growled Hyman, "that you're so fond of lying that you don't know the truth when you hear it."

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

TIP Branders recovered.

So did the leader of the gang with which Tip had foolishly cast his evil lot down in Pueblo, when he had first come west after robbing his mother. The man wounded in the neck had been at no time in a dangerous condition.

Not much sympathy need be wasted on Tip. He had chosen his own place in life, and had filled it.

Before Tip was out of the local hospital, and in his cell in jail, his mother, who had read of his fate in a newspaper in her home town, joined her son in the town of Clowdry.

She stood by her son to the last, until the testimony of officers and soldiers from Fort Clowdry had sent him away to prison for ten years.

At first, on his recovery, Tip Branders had been inclined to be boastful. He had shown his boldness by his thieving exploits and by daring to face the steady rifle fire of Private Hal Overton, United States Army. But when the sentence of the court came upon him Tip

broke down. He wept and could hardly stand. He implored the judge to lessen his sentence. All the braggadocio in him ran out as rapidly as the sawdust from a punctured doll.

The other members of the band received equally severe sentences, for all had been engaged in battle with troops who represent law and order.

From that trial Hal and Noll journeyed to Denver. Major Davis, of the Seventeenth Cavalry, also traveled from his post, for the trial of the baffled men who had attempted to rob the United States mail was on in the United States District Court. These men, too, were sent away to the penitentiary for long terms.

The writer of the anonymous note against Hal had so far escaped detection.

"We've been getting a lot of travel lately," smiled Hal as the two chums trudged down the road from the railway station to Fort Clowdry on their return from Denver.

"All we're going to have for a while, I hope," returned Noll Terry quietly. "I'd sooner put in my time learning soldiering."

"Not tired of the army yet, Noll?"

"I never shall be, nor you either, Hal, as long as we're young enough to serve."

"What I dread," mused Hal, "is the time when if we live to that age, we shall be too old

for the Army, and will have to go away and settle down in some town as retired men of the Army."

"That will be time to die, won't it?" asked Noll, so solemnly that Private Overton laughed merrily.

"That time is a long way off, Noll Terry. Let's see; we're eighteen now, and a fellow doesn't have to be retired, for age, until he's sixty-two."

"Forty-four years," figured Noll. "Oh, well, a fellow ought to be able to have a deal of fun in that number of years."

Both recruits were in merry mood as they turned in past the sentry at the main entrance to the post grounds.

They kept on, full of life and spirits until they reached the edge of the parade ground.

"Attention!" murmured Hal quietly.

Unostentatiously but with a world of reverence in their act both young soldiers lifted their uniform caps close to the shadow of the grand old Flag.

Without halting they passed on, returning their caps to their heads. Both young men of the service walked a trifle more erectly, if that were possible.

Nor had they gone much further when they espied a man coming toward them. The broad

white stripes down the seam of his trousers, and the double-barred shoulder straps proclaimed the infantry officer. It was Captain Cortland, commanding officer of B Company.

Both young soldiers raised their right hands smartly in salute as they passed the officer, who returned their salute in kind. Then Cortland halted.

"Glad to see you back, Overton."

"Thank you, sir."

"And you, too, Terry."

"Thank you, sir."

"And, by the way, Terry, I have remembered your request that you be transferred to B Company, and to Sergeant Hupner's squad room. Captain Freeman said he was sorry to lose you, Terry; but since you wanted to be with your friend, he has consented to your transfer to B Company. The matter has been arranged through the adjutant, and my first sergeant will notify you of your transfer when you return to your former squad room. I'm very glad, Terry, to have so good a soldier as yourself in B Company, even if I do have to rob Captain Freeman."

"Thank you, sir," replied Noll, with another salute.

Then the two young soldiers resumed their walk. Just as soon as they were out of earshot

of Captain Cortland, Noll broke forth jubilantly:

“In the same company at last, Hal, old fellow. Oh, won't it be great, now that we're truly bunkies at last!”

Great indeed—greater than either Hal Overton or Noll Terry guessed. They stood at the beginning, though neither suspected it, of some exciting and never-to-be-forgotten incidents and phases of the soldier's life.

What followed, however, will have to be reserved for the next volume in this series, which will be published under the title: “UNCLE SAM'S BOYS ON FIELD DUTY; Or, Winning Corporal's Chevrons.” In this volume the two young soldiers will be found to be no longer recruits, but trained soldiers of the Regular Army, and in the midst of a series of rousing adventures incidental to the military life.

THE END.

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